1. The Epic Literature in the Backdrop of the Vedas:

The story of Indian civilization dates back to the pre-Aryan times; hence it has all the elements—that come isolated or in groups—which help form, preserve and carry further the stream of religion meandering through various times, peoples and lands. The grandeur of the Indian religion lies in its assimilation of the divergent currents into its fold over millennia while many of the civilizations and religions either were buried in the history or broke apart.

The Aryan Vedas assimilated the non-Aryan rituals into its fold in the form of Atharvaveda as also the different deities that the indigenous religion brought in. The same spirit of eclecticism was exhibited when the challenge arose from Jainism and Buddhism. The process is to continue because it is the very nature of this great religion.

The epic literature is one of the most significant milestones in the course of Indian religion. The epic literature consisting of history (Itihasa) and mythology (Puranas) — the Mahabharata (Mbh, for short) and Ramayana as the books related to the history and the Puranas — 18 main and 18 subordinate — as the books related to mythology. However, the entire epic literature abounds in the philosophical as well as the practical views and guidelines.

The term purana usually occurs in association with Itihasa in old Sanskrit literature. Panini defines purana as that which is ancient (pura-purvasmin kale-bhavam) and (pura niyati iti). Sabdakalpadruma agrees with this definition. Vayu Purana (P) defines it as 'that which lives from ancient times' whereas Matsya P defines it as 'the records of ancient
events. The entire purpose of the epic literature is to aid the Vedic literature in reaching out to the masses, which began to be isolated by the exclusivity of the Brahmanical culture. The exercise carried out by the Brāhmaṇas themselves must have been in the response to the challenge posed by the generosity of Buddhism which started to carry along with it the royals as well as the lower strata of the society, and Jainism which appealed also the rich middle class, viz., the Vaishyas, sometime in the 5th cent. B.C. Distinction between history and myth was, however, made as early as the Atharva-veda, which records Purāṇa as a book and Itiḥāsa as another. As a class of literature, purāṇas are mentioned in Gopatha Brāhmaṇa(Br), Satapatha Br, and Taftitiya Aranyakā also. In course of time, as early as 1st cent. B.C., Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa formed a part of syllabus (śvādyāya) of the Vedic studies. Chandogya Upaniṣad (Up) clubs them together as the fifth Veda and recognizes the Mbh as Itiḥāsa-Purāṇa. Apastamba Śrauta-sūtra (600 to 300 B.C.) mentions that there were more than one purāṇa by that time-one of them being Bhaviṣyat P. Later on, as the Bhāgavatam tells us, sage Vyāsa, the author of the Mbh, is credited with the stupendous work of dividing the Purāṇa literature in to 18 books known as the Mahāpurāṇas to which were added, over a period of time, another set of 18 purāṇas known as the Upapurāṇas. The eighteen Mahāpurāṇas as mentioned in the Bhāgavatam and in other purāṇas are: Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Līṅga, Garuḍa, Nārada, Bhāgavat, Agni, Bhaviṣyat, Skanda, Brahmavaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Vāmana, Varāha, Matsya, Kurma, and Brahmāṇḍa. The majority of the scholars agree that the most of the Mbh was complete by 500B.C. and that the Bhaviṣyat and

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6 Mataya P, 53.63-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
7 Atharva-veda, XI,7,24; XVI,6,11-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
8 G. Br., 1,2,10-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
9 S. Br., 14.6.10.6-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
10 T. Ar., 2.10-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
11 Asvalayan Gevra Sutra, 3.3.1
12 Ch. Up., 7.1.7-quoted by Tagare-I, xvii.
13 Buher, SBE vol-II, p. xili; Pargiter, AHIT, p. 43
14 Skandh Bhāgavatam (S.R.), XII,13-4-8; also a list with some variation in Mataya P ch.53; Viṣṇu P, 3.6; Uttarakhanda, 263.81-84; Skanda P, Kodarkhanda
15 S.R., XII,7,23-24
from among the above as well as Vayu are the oldest *purāṇas* beside the Harivārīṣa or Khila *Mbh* The *Matsya P* and *Mārkaṇḍeya P* are also placed in the 3rd cent. A.D.; if not the final redaction, a beginning as well as a substantial part of them. Bhandarkar Institute, Pune, has prepared a critical study of the *Mbh* whereas the Oriental Institute, Baroda, that of the *Viṣṇu P* The similar project on the *Bhāgavat P* has been undertaken by the B.J. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad.

2. THE BHĀGAVAT RELIGION AND THE PLACE OF THE BHĀGAVATAM IN IT:

The *Mbh* reflects a great fusion of two divergent cultures-Aryan Brahmanism and pre-Aryan indigenous Śaktism as well as Śaivism, which may be considered as oldest surviving religion of the world, if the non-Vedic Śiva or Yogi and the bull emblems found at the Harappan site are any indication. The *Mbh* successfully fuses the religious consciousness of two great people, in its ‘henotheistic’ passages, to use the phrase of Prof. M. Muller. “I am Nārāyaṇa, I am creator and destroyer, I am Viṣṇu, I am Brahmā, I am Indra the master god, I am King Kubera, Yama, Śiva, Soma, Kaśyapa and also Prajāpati.”

The *Bhāgavat* religion probably begins from this point in the history. Vāsudeva is the most significant name of *Bhāgavat*, the significant mantra being ‘Aum Namo Bhagavate Vāsudevaya’. Kṛṣṇa, a Vedic Ṛṣi and Kṛṣṇa the non-Aryan warrior chief belonging to a nomadic tribe were identified into one and deified as Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa who is one with the Supreme God Viṣṇu. Megasthenes the Greek ambassador to the court of Candra-gupta (300 B.C.) knows Kṛṣṇa as ‘Heracles the god of Sauraseni’, being worshipped at Mathura on the river Jobares (Yamuna/Jamuna). Garbe believes Kṛṣṇa to have lived about 200 years before Buddha. This is quite tenable because we have the evidence to

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16 Acc. to Winternitz, HIL, vol-I, *Viṣṇu P*. dates back probably to the 4th cent. A.D.
17 ibid., 3rd cent. A.D.
18 Pargiter F.E., *The Purāna text of the Dynasties of Kali Age*, OUP, 1913,
19 HIL, vol-I, p.560
20 Sir John Marshall, *Mohen-jo-daro and the Indus civilization*
21 *Mbh*, III, 189,5
22 B.C., VII,9
23 Ṛg-veda,VIII,74; Kaustubha Br,XXX,9; Ch. Up, III,17
24 ibid.,VIII,96,13-15
believe that the worship of *Krṣṇa* was prevalent when Jainism arose.26 These and numerous other evidences prove wrong the theory held by certain scholars like Weber and M.T. Kennedy that Christ is the forerunner of *Krṣṇa* and the Bible the origin of the BG. A.B. Keith, among other eminent scholars, has also refuted the theory.

*Viṣṇu* the minor solar deity is now Supreme God. In the Vedic times as well, his realm came to be known as the aim of man.27 Of course, *Ṛg-veda* does mention him as the saviour of man from distress.28 *Trivikrama* the god of three strides29 and *Vāmana* the dwarf, a younger brother of the chief god *Indra*, have been superimposed together on *Viṣṇu* in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts.30

This transition from the Brahmanism to the very personalistic theism through the henotheistic tendencies of the Vedic religion bespeaks volumes of the religious revolution that this great land underwent. Microcosmically, it signifies the inherent urge of the human being to seek and find support in the personality cult, which culminated in *Krṣṇa* worship of the *Bhāgavatam*. All personal values such as glory (*aśvayya*), righteousness (*dharma*), fame (*yaśa*), property (*sampatti*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and renunciation (*vairāgya*)31 are attributed to *Bhagavān* in general and to *Krṣṇa* in particular. Besides being a religious necessity of the mass, the said transition was also a reaction to the Buddhist revolution, which overwhelmed the masses against the supremacy and exclusivity of Brahmanical culture as propagated by the *Vedas*. In Prof. Radhakrsnan’s words, “when Brahmanism ceased to be the religion of a few by assimilating the indigenous beliefs and religious practices of its surroundings, a philosophic restatement of the ancient wisdom became necessary.”32

The greatest contribution of the *Bhāgavata* religion may be considered as its very personal approach to – through devotion and unreserved love for – God as well as the role

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26 SBE, vol-12, pp.276-279
27 *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.9
28 *Ṛg-veda*, 6.49.13
29 Ibid., 3.284
30 S. Br. V.2.5.2-3; I.2.5.5; T. Br. I.6.1.5
31 *Viṣṇu* P, VI,5.74; S.B. III,24,32; etc.
32 S.R.K., Indian Philosophy, vol-1, p.481
of grace of God in the human life, which although latent even in the Vedic religion, found distinct identity of its own with the advent of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva on the religious scene of this land.

In conclusion, to agree with Prof. Garbe,33 we can summarise that there are four stages in the growth of the Bhāgavat religion:

1. Up to 300 B.C.: Founding of a popular monotheism based on Sāṅkhya-yoga by Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and the subsequent deification of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa on the basis of deepened religious sentiment of Bhakti. Aṣṭādhyāyī of Panini (500 B.C.), Patanjali (circa 200 B.C.), Kautilya (4th cent. B.C.), and Megasthenes (4th cent. B.C.) refer to the names of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṅkarsana-Baladeva. Originally, the two were associate gods of the tribal goddess Ekanamsa.34

2. 300 B.C. to the beginning of C.E.: The Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa cult was Brahmanised by identifying Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with the Vedic deity Viṣṇu attributing pre-eminence to the former as not merely a great god but as the greatest of all. This development took place alongside the relatively final redaction of the Mbh in which the word Vaiṣṇava as the name of a sect of the worshippers of Viṣṇu occurs.35

3. 1st cent. A.D. to 1200 A.D.: This is the period of transformation of the Bhāgavat religion into Vaisnavism and assimilation of the ideas of the schools of Vedānta, Sāṅkhya and Yoga. During this crucial period, the Ālvars of the southern India left their indelible impression on the Bhāgavat religion in general, and on the Bhāgavatam in particular.

4. 1200 A.D. onwards: The scholastic period which bifurcates mainly into Viṣṇu-worship as propagated by Ramanuja and Madhva in the south and Kṛṣṇa-worship as propagated by Vallabha, Nimbarka and Caitanya in the north, west and east.

The deification of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva which began in the Mbh, gradually found greater appeal and approval in the Harivāmśa and Viṣṇu P to be culminated, lastly, in the

33 Prof. Garbe, IA, 1918; also Jaiswal
34 Jaiswal, p. 57 & 231
35 Mbh,XVIII,6,97
Bhāgavatam. The effectiveness of this significant development is evident from its absorption in the religious consciousness of the varieties of people cutting across the length and breadth of this vast land over centuries till date. In addition to highlighting the core religious necessity of man, the book of the Bhāgavatam has been so masterly produced that even while pruning the size of the Mahabharata it retains the wisdom of the great book and also eclectically adds numerous esoteric metaphysical and spiritually practical principles of the ancient Vedic as well as yogic literature. This characteristic of the Bhāgavatam, to a certain extent, scores over the other puranas including the epic Ramayana.

No wonder the great Vaisnava masters Madhva Anandatirtha (1197-1276 A.D.), Vallabha, Caitanya as well as Sankara Deva in Assam based their systems mostly on the ground prepared by the Bhāgavatam. Madhvacarya (1238-1317 A.D.) paying a great tribute to the Bhāgavatam called it the 5th Veda, and for the first time in his preaching of devotion made use of the Bhāgavatam besides the older scriptures. His predecessors, the great Sankara and Ramanuja, on the other hand quote from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Madhvacarya resorted to the regular reading and interpretation of the Bhāgavatam in his preaching activities. He has also written a brief commentary on 1600 selected verses of the Bhāgavatam, called the Bhāgavatātma nirṇaya on the essence of the Bhāgavatam. He also established a Kṛṣṇa temple at Udupi.

Vallabha is so much overwhelmed by the depth of the Bhāgavatam that he put it along with the triad (the Prasthanatrayi—the Upaniṣads, the B.G. and the Brahma-sūtras) – the three books of foremost importance to the Vedānta – calling the quadrature as the prasthānacatusṭaya, giving it a status of a pramāṇa-grantha and considering it as the crown of all the sacred texts and Kṛṣṇa as the complete incarnation (purpañvatāra) of the Divine. Vallabha’s school of Vedānta holds that the Veda, the Vedāntasūtras (the Brahmasūtras) of Vyāsa, the BG and the Bhāgavatam are the progressive expositions of the revealed truth, each succeeding one being an explanation of and an improvement on the earlier. Moreover, it is to Vallabha that credit of popularizing the seven-day rendering of the Bhāgavatam (the Bhāgavata saptaḥ) goes. The weeklong exposition of the Bhāgavatam has been so much institutionalized that it continues to be an important feature of modern Hindu religion.
Swami Tapasyananda in his General Introduction to the translation of the Bhāgavatam pays tribute to the purāṇa as follows:

“If for any reason the claim of the Devī Bhāgavata (to be the Bhāgavata-mahāpurāṇa) is accepted, the n the place of the Viṣṇu Bhāgavata (the Bhāgavatam) can only be that of a Super-Purāṇa and not that of an Upa-purāṇa. For, its excellences are of such a transcending nature that it has practically eliminated all the other Purāṇas from the minds of men and become the one book of its kind that is widely studied by all devotees, commented upon by scholars of all schools of thought, and translated into several Indian languages, besides English. Although it is Vaiśṇava, and therefore sectarian in a way, its sectarianism is not one of narrowness and exclusion but only its way of eliciting the undivided attention and devotion of men to the Deity of their choice. In the sublimity, fervour and comprehensiveness of the pattern of devotion it inculcates, in the dignity, elevation and terseness of its Sanskrit diction, and in the lyrical beauty and wealth of imagery of its poetry, there is no Purāṇa that comes anywhere near it. It is undoubtedly one to the greatest productions of the literary and spiritual genius of India.”

3. **List of certain evidences regarding the development of the Bhāgavatism/Vaiṣṇavism:**

The extant version of the Bhāgavatam may have been written sometime in 400 A.D. or thereafter but the Bhāgavatism, the sect of which the Bhāgavatam came to be the scripture of prime importance has its roots many centuries before the C.E., as can be seen from the following epigraphic and other evidences.

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ghoshundi in Rajasthan</td>
<td>2nd cent. B.C.</td>
<td>Saṅkarṣaṇa &amp; Vāsudeva</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>A coin of Agathocles found in Alkhanum, Afghanistan</td>
<td>180-165 B.C.</td>
<td>Baladeva with plough &amp; Vāsudeva with wheel</td>
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| 3   | Besnagar/Vidisha near Gwalior, M.P. | Early 2nd cent. B.C.-5th Shunga | Garuda flag & Vāsudeva; title “Bhāga-

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36 S.T., vol-1, p. xxiii
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<td>4</td>
<td>king Bhagabhadra c. 113 B.C.</td>
<td>vata'</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Beginning of the 1st cent. B.C.</td>
<td>Sankarṣaṇa &amp; Vāsudeva</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Beginning of the 1st cent. A.D.</td>
<td>Viṣṇu</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Legend of Śrī Viṣṇupada-Svāmī-Nārāyaṇaḥ</td>
<td>Bhagavat (Viṣṇu) &amp; Jāmbavatī</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Image of 4 armed Viṣṇu and image of 12 armed Lakṣmi (presumably)</td>
<td>82nd year of Gupta era</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Era of Skandagupta</td>
<td>Śāṅgin (sārṅga-bow); Kṛṣṇa-Devaki</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Visnu as Vāmana, Lakṣmi, and Bali the king of Daityas</td>
<td>Skandagupta period</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>&quot;Rāmagirīsvāminah pādamūlataḥ&quot; (feet of Lord)</td>
<td>Queen Prabhavati Gupta of Gupta period</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Visvaraman 424-425 A.D. (contemporary of Kumargupta)</td>
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<td>No.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Nagari</td>
<td>423 A.D.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Khoh (copper plate) in Bundelkhand, M.P.</td>
<td>King Jayanatha 496-97 A.D.</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>King Sarvanatha 512-13 A.D.</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>King Samksobha 528-29 A.D.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Podagarh</td>
<td>5th cent. A.D.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Eran (stone pillar) in Sagar, M.P.</td>
<td>King Toramanā</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>King Budhabhuga 484-85 A.D.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Ci Aruton (rock) in Java</td>
<td>King Purnavama 5th cent A.D.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Mehrauli (iron pillar), Delhi</td>
<td>King Candraman (Gupta period)</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Aphisad (stone) in Gaya, Bihar</td>
<td>King Adityasena (Gupta period)</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Barabar hill (cave)</td>
<td>King Antarvarman</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Gadhava (stone) in Allahabad, U.P.</td>
<td>467-68 A.D.</td>
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Apart from these evidences, we have the evidences, which prove that the roots of the Bhāgavatism can be traced with the irrefutable evidences at least as early as 500 B.C. For example, records of Megasthenes\(^{37}\) (4\(^{th}\) cent. B.C.) as well as Quintus Curtius — a Greek historian of 1\(^{st}\) cent. B.C. who records on the authority of Alexander’s contemporary historians that the soldiers of Puru (Porus) carried the locket of Heracles (Hari-Kṛṣṇa or Ṣrīkṛṣṇa) while fighting the Greeks,\(^{38}\) Panini (500 B.C.) who in Aṣṭādhyāyī defines Vāsudeva as the devotee of Lord Vāsudeva,\(^{39}\) and Patanjali’s (2\(^{nd}\) cent. B.C.) commentary on Panini’s above-mentioned and other śūtras in his Mahābhāṣya. A.D. Pusalkar\(^{40}\) and others have presented sufficient data to prove the historicity of the greatest philosopher-king Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa who not only prevailed over the vast land from the North-West frontier to Magadha in east and to Tamil Nadu in the south, but also superseded all other Vedic deities of the Aryans as well as the non-Vedic deities of the natives of the ancient India.

4. DATE OF THE BHĀGAVATAM:
As in case of most of the religious as well as secular literature of India, the date and authorship of the Bhāgavatam also has not been precisely determined. Various scholars

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\(^{37}\) M.C.Crindle, p.140, 201-as quote by J.L.Shastri, AITM, vol-7, p.23

\(^{38}\) A.K.Majumdar, Caitanya-His life and doctrine, p.23

\(^{39}\) i śvādeva-viśṇu-abhyam’-Aṣṭādhyāyī, 4.3.98

\(^{40}\) A.D.Pusalkar, Studies in Epics and Purāṇas, pp.84-111
propose different dates differing from one another by centuries as is evident from the following:

1. Burnouf, Wilson, Colebrook: 1300 A.D.  
2. Bhandarkar: 200 years before Anandatirtha, i.e. 1000 A.D.  
4. Pargiter, Radhakrishnan, Farquhar: 900 A.D.  
5. C. Elliot: 800 to 900 A.D.  
6. D.S. Shastri: 825 to 850 A.D.  
7. Krsnamurti Sarma: 800 A.D.  
8. A.N. Roy: 550 to 650 A.D.  
9. Hazra: 500 to 550 A.D.  
10. Dikshitar: 300 A.D.  
11. Prof. S. Bhattacarya: 500 to 1030 A.D.  
12. S.S. Prasad: 800 to 850 A.D.  
13. T.S. Rukmani: Before 5th cent. A.D.

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41 HIL, vol-1, P.556  
42 Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and other Minor Religious Systems*, p.49  
43 S.N.D, *Indian Philosophy*, vol-IV, p.1  
45 HIL, op. cit.  
46 Pargiter F.E., *An Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 80  
47 S.R K., vol-II, p.667  
50 Shastri, *Concise History of Vaishnava Religion (Marathi)*, p.119  
52 Roy, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, II, p.79  
54 Dikshitar, *Paríśa Index*, vol-I, p.xxix  
55 Bhattacarya, "Introduction".  
56 S.S. Prasad, *The Bhagavat Purâna, A literary study, Introduction*
That there are no references to the *Purāṇa* in Ramanuja (1017 to 1137 A.D.) or in Yamunacarya (918 to 1038 A.D.) prompts the early European scholars to fix the date of the *Bhāgavatam* in the 13th or 14th cent. Van Butenen as also the contemporary American Indologist Prof. Sheridan refuses to accept the view only on the basis of *argumentum e silentio*. According to them “... a reasonable working hypothesis dates the *Bhāgavat P* around 900 A.D. and there seems to be no alternative to a south Indian origin.” Prof. Sheridan substantiates his view with that of F. Hardy. The renowned scholars like R.G. Bhandarker, S.N. Dasgupta, J.N. Farquhar, S. Radhakrishnan, Eliot, D.S. Shastri, and B.N.K. Sharma, more-or-less, agree with this date. J.N. Farquhar substantiates his view regarding the date of the *Bhāgavatam* while refuting Vopadeva as the author of the Book on the same proof that Madhva Anandatirtha who lived 50 years earlier than Vopadeva used the *Bhāgavatam* as the basic text of his newly founded sect. J.L. Shastri bases his argument regarding the date of the *Bhāgavatam* not being later than 5th cent. A.D. on a reference to the *Bhāgavatam* found in *Nandi Sūtra*, a work of Śvetāmbar Jaina canon, composed at Valabhi (Saurastra) by Devarth Gani in year 980 or 983 after Vira, i.e., 453-466 A.D. or 512-525 A.D. Simultaneously, he dismisses the views of R.N. Vyas.

57 Rukmani
58 Hopkins, *Vaishnava Bhakti Movement in the Bh P.*, p.7
59 Van Butenen, *On the Archaisms of the Bh P.*, p.26
60 R.N. Vyas, *Synthetic Philosophy of the Bh p.*, p.35
61 NIA, sept. 1942, p.132
62 AITM, vol-VII, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; xii
63 Prof. J.L. Shastri (AITM, vol-7, p.xxxv) draws our attention to the fact that Ramanuja has quoted a verse from *Vedasūri* of the *Bhāgavatam* (X, ch 87) in his *Vedānta tattvavāsa*.
64 Sheridan, p.7
66 AITM, vol-VII, p.xxxvii
67 op cit.
68 Shastri, *History and Culture of Indian People*, vol-V, p.442
and S.D. Gyani, which put the date of the Bhāgavatam as early as 900 B.C. up to 1200 B.C. - the time according to the two scholars when the dialogue between Śūka and Parikṣit may have been taken place. According to Prof. Shastri, the time of the dialogue may be indisputable but the language of the Bhāgavatam is much more modern than the Vedic one which is presumed to be prevalent in about 900 B.C. up to 1200 B.C. Similarly, he does not subscribe to the attempts to shift the date earlier based on Gaudapada’s commentary on the Uttara-Gītā where he mentions the Bhāgavatam and quotes the verse X,14,4; this Gaudapada, according to Shastri, is supposed to be a later author of the same name as the grand guru of Sankara. Likewise, the two verses common to Mathara Vṛtti and the Bhāgavatam (I, 8,52 & I, 6,35) are not taken as a conclusive evidence for fixing the date of the Bhāgavatam for, there is a chance that it is the Bhāgavatam which quotes either from Mathara Vṛtti or a source common to both. On the same ground, the similarity between the legends in the Bhāgavatam and the Jātakas as meticulously drawn by Gokuldas Dey cannot be accepted as the concrete evidence for determining the date of the Bhāgavatam.

On our part, we would not like to draw any conclusion as regards the date of the Bhāgavatam for two reasons. First, like most other scriptures of this land, the Bhāgavatam also mirrors the religious consciousness of various people spread over thousands of miles and spanning over several centuries. The Bhāgavatam is the mouthpiece of a movement-the movement which can be considered as a religious revolution that bridged the artificial gap between rather abstract ideology of the Upaniṣads and the very core requirement of man for the Personal Godhead. It was a breakthrough, which must have taken hundreds of years for its penetration in the religious consciousness of the people from the upper crest of the Himalayas to the foothills of the Dravid land, from the land of the seven seas (saptasindhu) to the Gangetic delta. The history of Vaiṣṇavism right from the Mauryan period as substantiated by the epigraphic, sculptural, glyptic and inscriptional evidences is the testimony of this fact. Secondly, we also consider it still a little early to agree with the scholars that Vopadeva was the final redactor of the Bhāgavatam, because a critical

69 AITM, p.xxxv
70 Ibid., p.xxxvi
71 G.D.Dey, Significance and Importance of Jātakas, quoted by R.N.Vyas, Synthetic Philosophy of Bhagavata, p.30
survey of the Purāna, which has been completed by the B.J. Institute of Indology of Ahmedabad on the basis of numerous manuscripts that could be available, does not support the view. However, our study and our approach to it does not depend so much on the historical facts as we are primarily concerned with the philosophical concepts and their practical application in the life of the man in general, and a religious person (śādha) in particular. We agree with the dictum of William James that 'Not the roots but the fruits of a theory are important'.

5. AUTHORSHIP OF THE BHĀGAVATAM:

Determining the authorship of the Bhāgavatam is even more complex a task than fixing the precise date of the text. As it is well known, most of the scriptures of this land including the Vedas—Sanhitā, Brahmans, Aranyaka and Upaniṣads, Smṛtis, Śūtras, Epics etc. have taken years—probably centuries—to acquire shape. Thus they represent not only various eras of the social and religious culturing but, also a varied kind of individual and collective imagination, activity and linguistic ability. The Bhāgavatam is not an exception.

Traditionally, Vyāsa is believed to be the author of the Bhāgavatam, Śuka, his son, its narrator and Suta probably its final redactor. The Bhāgavatam shows that it has amalgamated four traditions72:

1. Viśnū> Brahmā> Nārada> Vyāsa> Śuka (II, 4, 25; II, 9, 5-7; III, 4, 13)
2. Nārāyaṇa>Nārada>Vyāsa>Śuka (X, 87, 8)
3. Nārāyaṇa>Nārada>Prahlāda (VII, 6, 27-28)
4. Saṅkarṣaṇa>Sanat Kumāras>Sāṅkhyaśya>Parāsara>Brhaspati>Maitreya>Vidura (III, 8, 2-9)

Of these four, three have Nārada as common; two have Nārāyaṇa as the origin—presumably bearing some relation with the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mbh, one each has Viśnū and Saṅkarṣaṇa as origin. Nārāyaṇa and Saṅkarṣaṇa being two non-Aryan gods, as Jaiswal73 concludes, it may be presumed that the Bhāgavatam may have its roots in the pre-Aryan age not withstanding the fact that its final redaction took place at

72 A1TM, p.xxxvii
73 Jaiswal, pp. 32 & 62
much later period albeit not as late as the early European scholars such as Colebrook, Burnouf and Wilson thought. They assign the authorship of the *Bhāgavatam* to Vopadeva, the famous grammarian of the south India (circa 12th cent. A.D. or according to some, 1350 A.D.), who was a protégé of Hemadri, a minister of Ramaçandra-rava Yadava of Devagiri (1271-1309 A.D.) and the author of an index to the *Bhāgavata P*, *Muktāphala* and *HariMārta*. But the catalogue of the *Purāṇa* prepared by Al Biruni (1030 A.D.) disproves this belief. As we have already noted, J.N. Farquhar substantiates his view regarding the date of the *Bhāgavatam* as also refutes that the author of the *Bhāgavatam* was Vopadeva on the basis of a proof that Madhva Anandatirtha who lived 50 years earlier than Vopadeva used the *Bhāgavatam* as the basic text of his newly founded sect. As of now the view in favour of Vopadeva’s authorship is almost unequivocally rejected by the scholars.

It would be interesting to note that Nārada tradition as the origin of the *Bhāgavatam* finds cross-reference in one of the celebrated works on devotion and Bhāgavatism, viz., the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*. Therein Nārada considers love of the *Gopīs* of Vraja for *Krṣna* as the model of the supreme devotion. Moreover, the *Pañcarātra Ágama*, also called *Nārada Pañcarātra* and having a great influence on the *Bhāgavatam*, has Nārada as the narrator.

Agreeing with most of the scholars as regards the southern origin of the final redactor of the text, we may analyze three major stages in making of the *Bhāgavatam* based on the observations made by J.L. Shastri and others.

The influence of the Vedic literature: the *Bhāgavatam* uses very archaic language at many places proving the absorption of the Vedic or Vedic passages, words and metres. The prose passages resemble those in the *Brāhmapas*. They also make a detailed description of the south Indian topography. This may be the first stage in the development of the *Bhāgavatam*.

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25 AITM, vol-VII, p.xxxvii
26 NKS
27 AITM, vol-I, pp.xxx-xli
The influence of *Mbh, Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇu P*. During this stage the *Bhāgavatam* expanded into a *mahāpurāṇa* having ten characteristics as against the five enumerated by *Viṣṇu P* and others. The scholars generally assign the Gupta era to this stage.

The final redaction: The last redactor of the *Bhāgavatam* may have been a *Suta* who incorporated the *Pañcarātra* system, *Smṛti* texts, popular beliefs, folklore and importantly, the influence of the *Āḻvārs* of the south India. This stage may belong to the post-Gupta era.

The southern origin of the text may be conjectured from the following evidences:

1. XI,5,38-40 mentions the rivers Kaveri, Tamraparni, Payasvini, Kritamala—all from Tamil Nadu—as the most holy rivers and ‘those who drink their waters’ are considered to become devotees of *Vāsudeva*.

2. In the narration of *Balarāma’s* all-India pilgrimage, the southern places are described with detail as against the places of other regions.

3. In the *Puraṇjana* allegory, *Puraṇjana* reborn as a princess of Vidarbha marries a *Pāṇḍya* king *Indradyumna* and gives birth to seven Dravida kings (IV,28,29-30).

4. The *Gajendra* is described as king *Indradyumna* of the *Pāṇḍya* country (VIII, ch-7).

5. King *Satyavrata* encountered with the Fish incarnation in the river Kritamala of the south.

6. In the *Harivaṃśa, Jāmbavati* the queen of *Krṣṇa* has no Dravida as her son but, in the *Bhāgavatam*, she has one by that name (X,61,12).

7. Canto-V, ch-19 elaborately describes the hills and rivers of the south; in fact, the narration begins from the description of the southern places.

8. Even *Padma P* 1,48,50, in its *Glory of the Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavat Mahātmya)* is bent on putting religiosity of the southern land above many other regions. It considers the southern region (Dravida) as the origin of devotion.

6. **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE **BHĀGAVATAM AS A PURĀNA:**

As we know, the epic literature is mainly produced for the sake of common masses which either did not have access to the scholastic Brahmanical literature or did not have the
depth of knowledge to understand the esoteric literature. In order to instil the knowledge of the *dharma-śāstras*, the ancient lore, the deeds of the gods as well as the past kings and heroes, etc. in a way palatable to all and sundry of the society, the poets among the scholarly class created the epic literature, the recitation of which formed a part of religious ceremonies at the sacrificial and domestic festivals. The purpose behind this recitation necessitated to device a plan of the puranic literature based on the five characteristics (*pañcalakṣapā*). They are:

1. **Sarga**, the primary creation of the elements
2. **Visarga** or **Pratisarga**, the secondary creation of the universe by the demiurge
   *Brahmā* or the re-creation after destruction or the deluge
3. **Vamśa**, genealogy of the gods, *Manus* the Kings, *rṣīs*, eminent kings, and even eminent demons
4. **Manvantara**, the great epochs of the primal ancestor *Manu*
5. **Vamśānuñcarita**, the history of the solar and lunar dynasties

*Viṣṇu P* was the first to enumerate these five characteristics that were later on adopted in toto or with some variance by other *purāṇas*. Amarakośa of Amarasimha (6<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) confirms this definition although G.V. Devasthali tells that the *purāṇas* 'hardly conform to this definition.' According to A.D. Puralkar, "*pañcalakṣapā* occupies but an insignificant part (about 1/40) of the extant *purāṇas*." This was probably because of the popularity that the *purāṇas* gained over the Brahmanical literature. It became imperative on the puranic literature to widen its scope so as to include the recondite metaphysical portions of the Vedic literature as well as the shades of religion that the mass practiced. The job was taken up by the *Bhāgavatam* which extended the scope of *purāṇas* by adding another five characteristics; the *Brahmavaivarta P*, which evolved between 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. supported this evolutionary process. The subordinate or minor

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28 H.H., vol-I, p.313
29 *Viṣṇu P*, 3,6,25; *Agni P*, 1,2,27; *Garuda P*, 1,1,2; *Kurma P*, 53,64; *Śiva P*, *Vayūya samhitā*, 1,41; and *Viṣṇu P*, 4,10,11
30 Amarakośa, 1,6,5
31 G.V. Devasthali, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol-III, The classical age, p.292
32 A.D. Puralkar, *Studies in epics & purāṇas of India*, p.23
purāṇas (upapurāṇas) were attributed with the five characteristics mentioned hitherto whereas the major 18 purāṇas (mahāpurāṇas) were attributed with the five more characteristics in addition to the five attributed to the minor purāṇas. Thus, the pañca lakṣaṇa was transformed into the dasa lakṣaṇa.

The Bhāgavatam enumerates the ten in two places with a slight variation although the meaning conveyed at both places is more-or-less the same. The ten are as follows:

1. Sarga, the primary or subtle creation is the evolution of Prakṛti—the root-matter—into the microcosmic 23 categories such as ego, intellect, mind, the senses—five each of knowledge and action, and the subtle and gross elements—five each.84

2. Visarga, the secondary or gross creation out of the Virat Puruṣa is Brahma’s creation of macrocosm including all embodied beings—sentient and insentient.

3. Vṛtti or sthāna or sthiti, the means of sustenance is the law and order system of the society as well as the geography of the earth forming the residence and support of the creatures as discussed in canto-V of the Bhāgavatam.

4. Pośana or Rakṣā, protection is the welfare of all. It includes God’s grace (pośapa) as well as the incarnation that He assumes in order to protect the devotees and to establish the spiritual principles.

5. Hetu or Uti, the purpose of the creative activity of God includes the nature of jīva, its desire to act, ignorance (avidyā) — the root cause of all activity, and the law of Karma.

6. Manvantara, the periods of 14 Manus who are the patriarch in an era (kalpa), and the history of those periods which includes the descriptions of the combined activities of Manus, the six-fold group of his sons, gods, the seven sages and a Manvan-

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83 SB II,10.1; XII,7,9-10
84 ibid., XII,7,11; etc.
85 ibid., II,10.3
86 ibid., II,10.4
87 ibid., II,10.4; XII,7,14
88 ibid., II,10.4; XII,7,18
89 ibid., II,10.4
*tarāvatāra* – a specific incarnation of God intended for the promotion and well-being of all creatures.

7 *Vamśānucarita* or *Īsānukathā* or *Vamśa*, the dynastic history of the devotee kings and the story of God’s deeds includes genealogy – the descriptive lists of great royals and priestly lines descended from *Brahmā* – the demiurge.

8 *Saṁsthā* or *Nīrodha*, dissolution of first three kinds of dissolution out of total four kinds; the four kinds are: the dissolution of the manifested universe (*prakṛta pralaya*), partial dissolution (*naimittika*), ceaseless dissolution (*nitya*), and liberation or salvation of the soul (*ātyantika*).

9 *Mukti*, liberation is the fourth kind of dissolution, which refers to soul’s abandoning the false form and staying established in his essential nature of *Brahman*.

10 *Apāśraya* or *Āśraya*, the ultimate support is none but God – the Supreme Reality. *Āśraya* is that in which the creation and dissolution are definitely known to take place. It is also called the Supreme *Brahman* or the Supreme Soul. “He is the support of all; just as mud and other materials persist through all their conditions as effect such as pot, He continues to exist as the original substance when those conditions cease. Just as ‘Pure Being’ subsists through all the changing names and forms, so He exists from the conception to the death of an embodied being as the witness through all modifications and as the supporting residue when all changes cease.”

The first nine topics of *purāṇas* are meant as the preparation and promotion of the tenth, which is to enlighten the soul regarding the nature of the creator, His omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience and His redeeming activities thereby to generate in him love for God.

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90 ibid., XII, 7, 15
91 ibid., II, 10, 5
92 ibid., II, 10, 6; XII, 7, 17
93 ibid., II, 10, 6
94 ibid., II, 10, 7
95 ibid., XII, 7, 20 transl. S.T.
96 ibid., II, 10, 2
Traditionally, the canto wise distribution of the topics is made as follows:97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of characteristic</th>
<th>Canto</th>
<th>No. of chapters in the canto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Sarga</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Visarga</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sthana/Vṛtti</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Poṣañā/Rakṣā</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Hetul Uti</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Manvantara</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Isāṅukathā Varṇanucarita</td>
<td>IX</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Nirodha/Saṁsthā</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mukti</td>
<td>XI</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Āśraya</td>
<td>XII</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eminent authors like Vopadeva in his Harililāmyṛta, Vallabha in his Nibandha (Saprakāśa-Tattvārthadipa-nibandha) and old commentators like Śridhara, Vira Raghava, Vijayadhvaja and others also support this distribution. They have left out the cantos I & II, which are designated by some writers as qualification (Adhikāra) and duty (Dharma), respectively; in fact, the canto-II is an epitome of the Bhāgavatam with all its characteristics. These traditional writers attach special significance even to the number of chapters in each canto; however, many scholars find it difficult to approve this kind of significance.98 In fact, there is no strict scheme in the Bhāgavatam as shown above because there is ample overlapping, repetition and looseness in organisation of material.

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97ATIM, VOL-7, p.xxiil
98ibid., pp. xxiv-xxxiii
due to the *Bhāgavatam* being an epic of growth.

Gangasahaya attaches significance to these characteristics as delineated in the *Bhāgavatam* I,1;1:

7. **THE COMMENTARIES ON THE BHĀGAVATAM:**

The depth of the *Bhāgavatam* and its capacity to touch the core of man’s being attracted the scholars from every school of *Vedānta* to annotate a commentary upon the scripture. M.N. Chatterji in 1895 records as many as 136 commentaries and treatise on the *Bhāgavatam*.

In the hundred years that followed, there may be many more to add to these. Principal Commentaries on the *Bhāgavatam* are as follows:

(i) **Kevalādvaita School**:

1. A commentary purported to have been written by Citsukha (1220-84 A.D.).

2. *Bhāvārtha-dipīka*: Sridhara Svami (14th cent. A.D.): The most acknowledged commentary and followed in some or the other way by each of the commentators irrespective of his sectarian loyalty. Sridhara, however, expresses due recognition to Citsukha by declaring to follow his line of interpretation.

3. *Bhāvārtha-dipīka-Prakāśa*: Bansidhara (I to V.Skanthas): An elaborate and very erudite commentary on Sridhara by a *Guādiya Vaiśnava* belonging to *Acintyabhedabheda* school. His is one of the most revered of all commentaries post-Sridhara.

4. *Anvītārtha-prakāśikā*: Ganga Sahaya (Ed. by Krsnasankara Sastri, Ahmedabad, 1968): It is almost a word-to-word commentary explaining in detail even the grammatical form of the text.

5. *Dīpanī*: Radha Ramana Goswami: Although this is an elucidation of Sridhara’s commentary, the author himself is inclined to *Guādiya Vaiśnāvism* (*Acintyabhedabheda*).

(ii) **Viśistādvaita School**:


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99 ibid., p. xxii
100 ibid., p.5
2 Bhāgavata-Candrika: Vira Raghava (14th cent. A.D.)

(iii) Dvaita School:
1 Bhāgavat-tātparya-nirṇaya: Madhva Anandatīrtha: A digest rather than a commentary.
2 Pada-Ratnāvali: Vijayadhvaja (15th cent. A.D.): A close follow up of Madhva’s work and having some interpolated verses and passages.

(iv) Śuddha-Advaita School (Pusti-mārga):
1 Subodhini: Vallabhaçarya (1479-1531 A.D.): An incomplete work but one finest expositions
2 Subodhini-Prakāśa: Purusottam Goswami (1700 A.D.): An elucidation of Subhodhini
3 Bāla-Prabodhini: Giridharalala Goswami (later part of 19th cent. A.D.)

(v) Nimbārka School:
1 Siddhānta-Pradīpa: Suka Deva

(vi) Vaiṣṇava School of Caitanya Mahāprabhu (Acintya Bhedabheda):
1 Ujjavala-nilamani (with the commentary of Jiva Goswami and Visvanatha Cakravarti): Rupa Goswami, 2nd ed., Nirmaya Sagar Press, Bombay, 1925.
2 Krama-Sandarbha: Jiva Goswami (16th cent. A.D.): He also wrote Vaiṣṇavatoṣani on canto X of the Bhāgavatam
3 Sārārtha-darśini: Visvanatha Cakravarty
4 An incomplete work by Sanatana Goswami

(vii) Others:
1 Bhākta-Manoranjanī: Bhagavat Prasad (Ahmedabad Edition): A commentary on the basis of Svāmi-Nārāyana cult, which again follows Viśiṣṭādvaita.
8. **Visnu:**

*Visnu* is derived from *vis* (ṣ U) ‘to pervade’, ‘to surround’ or *vis* (ṛ P) ‘to enter’ and ‘to be active.’

*Visnu* a deity of great importance in the Hindu pantheon for about 2500 years or more held a lesser important position in *Rg-veda* wherein only five hymn are dedicated to him although his name occurs for about 100 times which statistically places him on the fourth rank among the Vedic deities.

He is the active god as the etymology suggests as also his other names *Vikramaditya*, *Urukrama* (wide-striding), *Urugaya* (wide-going), *Eṣa* (swift), *Evayanana* or *Evaya* (swift-going) do. The strides, three in number, cover the universe; two of these steps or spaces are visible to men, but the third is beyond the mortal ken.

Three steps are often explained as denoting three manifestations of light, *viz.*, fire (Agni) on the earth, lightening (Indra or Vāyu) in the ether and sun in the sky, or the three places of the sun, *viz.*, its rising, culmination, and setting.

The most of the European scholars favour *Visnu*’s equation with the sun but there are two interpretations of three strides:

1. the rising, culmination, and setting of the sun;
2. the course of the solar deity through the three divisions of the universe, *viz.*, the earth, the ether, and the space/sky or *bhu*, *bhuvah*, *svah*.

The first view is supported by Yaska’s predecessor Aurnavabha (*Nirukta* 12,19), and the modern scholars such as Whitney, Max Muller, Hang, Kaegi, Deussen, Keith, Banerjea,
etc. Another predecessor of Yaska, Sakapuni, and certain modern scholars such as Bergaine, Macdonell and Kuhu supports the second view.

Visnu in one passage is described as setting in motion like a revolving wheel, his 90 steeds (days) with their four names (seasons) indicating a solar year of 360 days. Oldenberg, R. Otto, and Gonda, however, have reservation regarding the solar interpretation of Visnu, which in their opinion is only one of the meanings, the other conveying Visnu’s association with vegetation, fertility, and principally his power, or ‘numen’ as R. Otto calls it, to pervade and penetrate the regions of the universe. He is said to be a protector of embryos and is invoked along with other deities to promote conception. Once Visnu is also called upon to place in the womb a male child with the most beautiful form or, say, a male child with Visnu’s most beautiful form is prayed for. These references to Visnu’s most beautiful form draw us to what his form is like. The anthropomorphic traits are pronounced by ‘his strides’ as also by his being ‘a youth vast in body who is no longer a child’.

The potential of turning into the supreme deity rested in Visnu’s character even in the times of Rg-veda. We know that he was considered as a god with long strides who could measure or pervade the whole universe. Visnu is described in numerous hymns of Rg-veda as an intimate friend of Indra. Together they fight with and slay Vṛtra, triumph over Daśa, destroy Śambara’s 99 castles and conquer the hosts of Varcin. They are of-

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108 refer Macdonell and also Jaiswal
109 Macdonell, pp.38-39
110 Rg-veda, 1.155.6 (also 1.164.4; 1.164.48)-as quoted by Macdonell
111 Quoted by Macdonell
113 Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism*-as quoted by Jaiswal
114 Rg-veda, 7.36.9
115 ibid., 10.184.1
116 ibid., 10.184.17-as quoted by Macdonell
117 ibid., 1.155.6
118 ibid., 6.69 (dedicated to the two conjointly); 7.99.5.6; 1.155.2; 7.99.4; 1.154.6; 1.155.1; 1.22.19
119 ibid., 4.18.11; 6.20.2
120 ibid., 7.99.4.5
ten invoked together. When associated with Indra as a dual divinity, Visnu shares Indra’s powers of drinking Soma as well as his victories. Indra participates in Visnu’s power of striding and Visnu strides his three steps by the energy (ōjas) of Indra who, by drinking Soma, increases the strength of Visnu. He traversed the earthly spaces for wide-stepping existence along with Indra, he fastened the world all about with pegs, within the three steps all beings dwell, and they are full of honey. He thrice traversed the earthly spaces ‘for the man in distress’ and to bestow the earth on man for dwelling. Besides, in taking strides, he observes laws; he is ‘the ancient germ of order’ and an ordainer like Agni, Sūrya, and Usas. The other godly traits of Visnu are beneficence, liberality, innocuousness and beauty, his being a guardian, undecievable, innoxious and generous deliverer. Above all, he alone sustains the threefold world, heaven and earth, and all beings. Lastly, the germ of the concept of Vaikuntha or Goloka the highest abode of Visnu.

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121 ibid., 4.2.4; 4.55.4; 8.10.2; 10.66.4
122 ibid., 6.69
123 ibid., 7.99.4-6
124 ibid., 6.69.5; 7.99.6
125 ibid., 8.12.27
126 ibid., 8.3.8; 8.12.16; 10.113.2; 2.22.1; etc.
127 ibid., 1.154.1; 6.49.13
128 ibid., 1.155.4
129 ibid., 6.69.5.6
130 ibid., 7.99.3
131 ibid., 1.154.2
132 ibid., 1.154.4
133 ibid., 6.49.13
134 ibid., 7.100.4
135 ibid., 1.22.18
136 ibid., 1.155.2-4
137 ibid., 1.156.5
138 ibid., 7.40.5
139 ibid., 8.25.12
140 ibid., 3.55.10
141 ibid., 1.22.18
142 ibid., 1.155.4
143 ibid., 1.154.4
which is the most coveted place for his devotees lie very much in the *Rg-vedic* hymn that describes the 'highest step of *Viṣṇu*, as seen by the liberated, like an eye fixed in the heaven'¹⁴⁴; and 'it is his dear abode where pious men (and gods)¹⁴⁵ rejoice and where there is a well of honey'.¹⁴⁶ This is also a brightly shining step (abode) wherein dwells In- dra with *Viṣṇu*, and where there are the many-horned swift-moving cows, and it is the place that the singer desires to attain.¹⁴⁷ The most scholars interpret the cows in this passage as clouds whereas some interpret the highest step as the moon and cows as the stars.¹⁴⁸ He is also once spoken of as guarding the highest abode.

The *Brāhmaṇas* take up the material from the *Rg-veda* and develop myths around *Viṣṇu* that further on mature into one of the most significant elements of the Vaiṣṇavism, viz., the theory of incarnations of *Viṣṇu*. *Śatapatha Br¹⁴⁹* and *Taittiriya Br¹⁵⁰* conceive *Viṣṇu* as taking three steps in earth, air, and heaven; this act of *Viṣṇu* is attached to the sacrifice and considered as a safe refuge which is the sun.¹⁵¹ *Śatapatha Br*,¹⁵² *Aitreya Br*,¹⁵³ and *Taittiriya Sanhitā*¹⁵⁴ also cultivate the myth of *Vāmana* around *Viṣṇu* and Indra who are confronting the mighty demons (*asuras*). Here *Viṣṇu* also assumes the leadership of the gods.

Transition to another myth – of *Varāha*, the Boar incarnation—is marked by *Rg-vedic* passages, which describe *Viṣṇu* as carrying off 100 buffaloes and a brew of milk in possession of a boar which is equated with *Vṛtra*. Macdonell very interestingly points out how the demon in the form of a boar was metamorphosed into an incarnation of *Viṣṇu* in the post-Vedic Brahmanical literature.¹⁵⁵ Another interesting part of this transition is the

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¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 1.22.20
¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 8.29.7
¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 1.154.5
¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 1.154.6
¹⁴⁸ *Hardy, Vedisch Brahmanische Periode*, 33; Peterburger Worterbuch
¹⁴⁹ *S. Br*, 1.9.3.9
¹⁵⁰ *T. Br*, 3.1.2.7
¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 1.9.3.10.15
¹⁵² *S. Br*, 1.2.5
¹⁵³ *A. Br*, 6.15
¹⁵⁴ *T. S*, 2.1.3.1; *oko T. Br*, 1.6.1.5
¹⁵⁵ Macdonell, p.41
gap that Prajāpati filled up before the mythologisation of Viṣṇu in the form of incarnations of the boar, fish (matsya), and tortoise (kurma). In course of the development of Brahmanical literature Viṣṇu not only assumes the prime position but also wins over many a myths and features of Indra. Later on, as we shall see, Indra is not only relegated to a subordinated position but also described as having cultivated a rivalry against Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

In Upaniṣads, Viṣṇu assumes the title of Bhagavān and the supremacy over everything that exists. It cannot be irrefutably judged whether the myths woven around Viṣṇu are a later development or a later redaction. Gonda rightly suggests that Viṣṇu may have been more popular among masses even in the Rg-vedic age when he was already a great god, if not the greatest, but the ideas and inclinations of those masses are not recorded in the Vedas.

Prof. S. Bhattacharyya postulates the transformation of eight-armed Viṣṇu of the Vedas into four Vyūhas of Pañcarātra.

The Bhāgavatam knows Viṣṇu to be the first incarnation of the transcendental Supreme Reality. Again, as the nature of Viṣṇu being pure Sattva, and that by sattva the Supreme Reality sustains the creation, all incarnation of God are said to be the incarnations of Viṣṇu only. The concept of Viṣṇu as found in the Bhāgavatam is discussed in the first chapter of the thesis.

9. NĀRĀYANA:

Nārāyaṇa-the name-is found for the first time in the two passages of the Śatapatha Br. In both the passages his divinity is proclaimed. He is the author of Puruṣa suktam. With
the performance of the five-day sacrifice—Pañcarātra satra, he gains superiority over all beings and become identical with all beings. Probably, herein lie the roots of Pañcarātra system, one of the constituents of the Bhāgavat religion in general and the Bhāgavatam in particular, with Nārāyaṇa as the deity of worship.

As usual the western rationalist have tried to euhemerise Nārāyaṇa on the basis of the following premises:

Nārāyaṇa is derived from an ancestry (gotra) called Nara. According to the view, he was a sage born in Nara gotra and along with Nara; he was the advocate of the solar worship that led to their identification with Viṣṇu—the sun god.¹⁶⁶

Nārāyaṇa was indeed a human being who performed the sacrifice and attained the godhood. He is described as Puruṣa—Nārāyaṇa.

However, the modern scholars such as Jaiswal strongly rejects these views deriding the euhemeristic tendency, which, she says, leads to far-fetched rationalism and reconstruction of wrong history with no sound justification.¹⁶⁷ The clear mention of Nārāyaṇa as god in the Brāhmaṇas is the testimony of her view. The adjective Puruṣa refers not to man but to the Primal Being.

The absence of Nārāyaṇa in the Saṁhitās led some scholars to think of him as non-Vedic deity. L.B. Keny is of the view that Nārāyaṇa is a deity of Dravidian origin, his name being made up of three Dravidian words: nar-ay-an in which nar= nīr meaning water, ay=to lie in a place, and the ending an=the male. Mbh refers to waters as Nara having been produced of Nara—the sage.¹⁶⁸ Manusmrī refers to Brahmā—the progenitor of the worlds as Nārāyaṇa since Brahmā’s movement or residence (ayana) initially occurred in waters, and waters are called Narah having been produced of Nara—the Primeval Man.¹⁶⁹ Some purāṇas also agree with this view but Jaiswal in tune with the view of R.G. Bhandarkar¹⁷⁰ refers to the Nārāyaṇīya section of Mbh according to which

¹⁶⁶ Barnett, Hindu gods and heroes, pp.76-78; also D.C.Sircar, Age of Imperial Unity, p.437—as quoted by Jaiswal
¹⁶⁷ Jaiswal, p.33
¹⁶⁸ Mbh, 12,328,35
¹⁶⁹ Dharma-shastras, chs.1-v as quoted by W.J.Wilkins, Hindu Mythology
¹⁷⁰ R.G.Bhandarkar, Vaisnavism, Saivism and minor religious systems, pp.42-43
God is known as *Nārāyana* for he is the refuge (ayana) of all men (narah). This appears to be an acceptable meaning of the word 'Nārāyana' as it aptly signifies the Reality which the word has since long represented.

By the time of *Mbh* *Nārāyana* was not only identified with *Viṣṇu* but also considered as the fountainhead of the Trinity of *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*. *Mbh* prefers 'Nārāyana' to 'Viṣṇu' in order to denote the deity. There is also a suggestion that the name and god *Nārāyana* may be traced to the Indus valley civilization, and that some features of *Nārāyana* correspond to the Sumerian god *Ea* or *Enki*, who sleeps in a chamber in the midst of waters.

Shaping the view that *Nārāyana* was a non-Aryan or Dravidian deity who later on got assimilated in the Brahmanical pantheon only on the basis that the *Samhitas* do not mention his name can neither be accepted nor be rejected; *argumentum e silentio* cannot be accepted as the proof for or against anything.

### 10. *Bhagavān:*

'Bhaga' in *Ṛg-veda* means 'wealth', 'share', a 'lucky share' and *Bhagavān* or *Bhagavat*, therefore, is a possessor of wealth etc. In this sense *bhaga* is derived from *bhaj* (1 U), which in the Vedic times meant 'divide', 'distribute', 'allot', 'share with', or 'partake of' as in *vibhāga*, *vibhājan*, *bhajart* etc.; *bhaj* 'to adore', 'to serve', 'to worship' is a later development. Hopkins quotes a *Ṛg-vedic* hymn (10,60.5) wherein *bhagavat* is applied to the owner of the *bhaga* who is also the giver. This passage probably for the first time uses the word *Bhagavān*, describing a god *Bhaga*. It is also followed by 'Bhagavāntah' referring to the worshippers of *Bhaga* who too would become the possessors of the wealth. According to this reference from the *Ṛg-veda*, the term is applied to both – to a
god and to men – who worship that god named Bhaga, such a man used to be considered as blessed.  

It is Maitri Up, which for the first time decorates Visnu with the title Bhagavat. However, the reference pertains to food also called bhagavat Visnu for, it was food in the form of grain and cattle that used to be considered as wealth; and that is how in its earlier usages ‘bhakta’ means ‘meal’. Later on, rice the staple food of the community came to be known as bhakti. Even Yaska speaks of morning libations as agni-bhaktani – the shares of Agni.

In course of time, any divinity was called Bhagavan; further on, any revered person such as kings in the Gupta period, sages, and priests, elderly ones were also addressed as Bhagavan. Much before the times of Mbh ‘Bhagavan’ must have been prefixed to Nārāyana-Visnu although it is Mbh, which defines bhaga as the group of six qualities that belong only to Nārāyana-Visnu. Of course, before this, Patanjali mentions Śiva-bhāgavatas meaning the devotees of Śiva, the same epithet later on not only became popular to denote the devotees of Nārāyana-Visnu but also lost its reference to Śiva.

The Bhāgavatam makes abundant use of ‘Bhagavan’, using the title mainly to mean the Supreme Reality. The book applies the adjective not only to the three cosmic manifestations of God, all the incarnations, and sages but also extends the feminine form of the adjective ‘bhagavatī’ to Māyā – whether in the sense of God’s potency or in the sense of the deity. Even the distinct meanings of ‘Nārāyana’, ‘Mahāvisnu’ or ‘Visnu’, and ‘Bhagavan’ have lost their original identity in the Bhāgavatam, which uses any of the epithets for the Supreme Reality whether in the form of the Primal Man, the four-armed Lord who resides in the Vaikuntha with His consort Laksni, the Cosmic Being, or the transcendental Reality.

178 Jaiswal, p.38
179 op cit.
180 Nirukta, 7,8-as quoted by Jaiswal, p.38f
181 Mbh, 12,271,59-61
182 Patanjali on Panini, V,2,76; Mahābhāṣya, 2, p.387-as quoted by Jaiswal,p. 39
183 infra, p. 35
11. **Krṣṇa, the God of the Bhāgavatam:**

Nārāyaṇa and Mahāviṣṇu of the Śruti and Krṣṇa of the itihaśa-purāṇas—mainly the Mbh, Harivamsa and Viṣṇu P—are blended in to the one superhuman personality of Krṣṇa by the Bhāgavatam. Krṣṇa is, indeed, the god of the bhāgavatas and the Bhāgavatam. The Book is set in the backdrop of the life of Krṣṇa, revolves around it and aims to establish the ontological identity of Krṣṇa with the Supreme Reality. Many a times, the four-armed form of Mahāviṣṇu is superimposed on his human form without the fear of losing the rational ground for such superimposition. Krṣṇa is extolled as the Transcendental Reality and as the governor of the universe. However, it would be preposterous to be carried away by the idea of Krṣṇa that is promulgated by certain vaisṇava schools including Acintyabhedābheda. It militates against the universalism of the Bhāgavatam to conclude on the similar lines that only Krṣṇa represents the totality of the Supreme Reality, and other forms and incarnations of God are but inferior to the form and incarnation of Krṣṇa. To the Bhāgavatam, all forms of the Supreme Reality that are worshipped by different devotees are equally divine. The aim of the Book is to establish the monism, the universal idea of the Supreme Reality, and preach the universal Bhāgavat Dharma.

12. **Hymns of the Bhāgavatam:**

The Bhāgavatam is replete with the hymns, sung by the devotees, gods, Brahmā, and even the demons in praise of one or the other form of God. The hymns come forth from within the heart of the devotees either as supplication or as greeting their chosen deity. In addition to the amazing literary value, the hymns of the Bhāgavatam abound in the esoteric truth about God’s reality and His nature. Most of the metaphysical truths of the Book are expressed through the hymns. Therefore, we give below the list of those hymns so that one may refer to those in order to have the idea of the nature of the Supreme Reality, as also for the heightening one’s spiritual consciousness.

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<td>70</td>
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<td>73</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<td>Jāmbavān</td>
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<td>X,53,26-28</td>
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<td>Prthvi</td>
<td>Kṛṣṇa</td>
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13. THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE PRESENT STUDY:

The Bhāgavatam although a late work with compared to other works of the Bhāgavatism such as the ṇMb, Harivamsa, Viṣṇu P, Pañcaratārā Ṭāgamas etc., acquired prominence soon after its final redaction. Its impact on the religion and various cultures of India is evident from its influence on Ālvārs in particular and the post-Ramanuja Vedānta schools in general. The Bhāgavat Dharma, owing to its eclecticism, has been absorbed in parts or in totality, by most of the sects of Hindu religion irrespective of the land of their origin. With Madhva, Vallabha and Caitanya popularizing the Bhāgavatam, the fame the Bhāgavatam spread not only all over to the south, the east and the west of India, but also surpassed the other literature of the Bhāgavatism. Its depth in gauging the religious truths and breadth in reaching out to all strata of the society, enable its fame to spread far and wide in India and beyond the seas.

The universality that the Bhāgavatam preaches in regard to philosophy as well as religion, that is to say concerning ideas and practice, justifies the in-depth study of the book. The universal attitude of the Bhāgavatam is pronounced in its metaphysical, ethical, epis-
temological, and psychological ideas regarding God, Man, and the world. The universal-
ity of the Bhāgavatam, as well as its emphasis to take its philosophy to practical level has
set it apart from other books of the Bhāgavatism. The ability of the Bhāgavatam to make
the sublime philosophical principles understandable and practicable in all terms naturally
attracts the sādhaka to carry out its in-depth study. Proof of the pudding lies in eating.
The post-modern thinkers emphasize the praxiological implications of a theory or any
piece of knowledge. In this regard, Habermas says that while evaluating any theory, not
only the empirical observation and rational criteria be applied, but the ‘Functional’ prop-
erties of a theory should also be considered, i.e., it remains to be seen how far the theory
serves “emancipatory interest” of the mankind. The quest for such a value has motivated
this study.

Further, the bhakti doctrine that the Bhāgavatam professes has changed Man’s approach
to the Divine. The Infinite is brought to the level of the finite in the form that the finite
may find easy to communicate with. The Christianity also professes similar kind of devo-
tional attitude towards ‘the Son of God’, but a detailed map for cultivation of such devo-
tion as presented in the Bhāgavatam is hardly to be found in any other scripture of either
Indian origin or belonging to other religions. This has made the Bhāgavatam a scripture
for the sādhakas. Moreover, the Bhāgavatam goes on to lead this personal attitude of an
aspirant of the beatitude to the level of Supreme Devotion (Parābhakti), the concept that
is unique to the Bhāgavatism, and finds a special and prominent place in the Bhāga-
vatam.

The religion as preached by the Bhāgavatam not only the leading light unto the aspirant
who look for spiritual values over and above the mundane life, but also promises the
value-based life on the basis of Vedic traditions to the relatively worldly-minded people
thereby improving the overall social structure and the quality of the individual life.

Indeed it is ‘the nectar of the fruit of divine tree of the Vedas,’

\[\text{equal to the Vedas (Brahmasamhitam), according to the Vedas (vedāntas)},\]

impert by Śrī Bhagavān

\[184\] S.B., I,1,3
\[185\] ibid., 3,40; II,8,28
\[186\] ibid., XII,13,12
Himself." In the words of Vyāsa – the author of the Book, the Bhāgavatam is the essence of all wisdom soaked in the nectar of supreme devotion, and "it gives the highest bliss and destroys the three kinds of misery. Can the Supreme Lord be realized in the heart immediately by the teachings of other (treatise)?" There have been several valuable researches on the Bhāgavatam in the modern times apart from the classical studies carried out on the text by the ācāryas of various vedāntic schools. In addition to the academic works, there are a vast number of books written in vernacular by various learned 'kathākāras' as well as 'panditās', which, however, may not be considered as research works in the strictest sense.

Although some of the modern researches provide us with basic insight in the practicability of the philosophy of the Bhāgavatam, which appears to me to be one of the outstanding characteristics of the Bhāgavatam, none of those have explored it in a way that could benefit alike the laity and an advanced adherent of the religious life. Practicability and universality, which are the basic parameters of philosophy are, in fact, also the drivers behind the creation of the Bhāgavatam, as is explicit in the very first question of the King Pariksit to Śuka: 'What a man encountered with death should do?' Death is the most certain but the most unpredictable phenomena; hence, any time could be the time of its visitation. Thus, the Bhāgavatam tries to find an answer to the problem that concerns every single human being at every moment – whether one is aware of it or not. If one becomes aware, then the answer aims at changing the course and destiny of the human life, hence the approach of the Book is thoroughly praxiological.

These are among the major drivers, which induced me to take up this study.

12. THE METHOD OF THIS STUDY:
The scripture that is of the origin of the pre-scholastic era is more likely to be misread particularly by the academic reader of the modern times. This susceptibility is not grounded in the scripture but verily in the modern academic reader who naturally tends to have formed a habit of viewing all ideas through one or the other glasses provided by different schools of the Vedānta. The point of utmost importance for the study of any

\[\text{\textsuperscript{xvi}}\text{ibid., XII,13,10; II,8,28; II,9,43; III,8,2}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{xvii}}\text{ibid., II,1,2, transl., Tagare}\]
scripture that has origin in the pre-scholastic era is that the informed reader is required to read the scripture in the light of the scriptures that preceded it rather than read it in the light of the ideologies that succeeded it. In this case, it would be wise to study the Bhāgavatam in the light of the Mbh, Harivamśa, Viṣṇu Pṛtī etc. or at the most in the light of the works of the Āḻvārs who have left an indelible mark on the Book, rather than in the light of the philosophies of the ācāryas, because most of the scholars agree that at least the original version/versions, if not the final reedition, of the Book date back to the pre-scholastic era.

Modern hermeneutics adopts similar method. According to the Hermeneutical Approach of Gadamer, the hermeneutical circle has to be completed for the proper interpretation of the text. The hermeneutical circle can only be established by ‘the fusion of horizons’ between the author and the reader. One of the methods of establishing the fusion of horizons is to evaluate the text in the light of the environment – socio-cultural and religious – in which the text is written. With this scientific attitude of reading the Bhāgavatam, the reader will not encounter with the problem of finding the ideas in the Book as conflicting with one or the other schools of the Vedānta.

In order to do justice to the exegetic study of the scripture such as the Bhāgavatam, the traditional Indian method of śravaṇa, manana and nīdiḥśrīṣṇa must be adopted. That is to say, the Book should be read with the utmost unconditioned mind, its meaning should be critically contemplated upon with the help of other available relevant sources of knowledge including inference, and lastly, the crux that is derived out of the rational process must be exclusively focused upon with deep meditation in the pursuit of the intuitive knowledge, which is regarded as the highest kind of knowledge. Even the modern psychology has tacitly approved this process of acquiring synthetic knowledge. Śravaṇa is analogous to the pramāṇa of verbal testimony which is undisputedly regarded the indispensable first step to acquire knowledge. Resorting to śravaṇa may not be construed as a dogmatic conditioning of mind right on the first step of sādhanā; for, in any case the input of the initial knowledge has to be mediate or indirect, and the reliance on the verbal testimony, particularly in the Indian context is the reliance on the time-tested truths passed on to us by best of the personalities of the antiquity. This, however, applies to every fundamental scripture of all religions of the world. The goal is not to know the truth
indirectly through any of the means of knowing. In the words of Prof. Hiriyanna, “Truth, as learnt from either (revelation – verbal testimony and one’s own perception, or reason), is not an ultimate, but an instrumental, value... the final criterion... is neither reason nor revelation but one’s own intuitive experience.”

It would not be surprising if the study of the scripture such the Bhāgavatam leaves an everlasting impression on the scholar who proceeds with the above-mentioned outlook toward acquiring the insight into its philosophy and the method of praxis.

Note: 1. All the references in the footnote are from Śrimad Bhāgavatam unless specified otherwise.

2. The footnote reference marked with the asterik ‘*’ are some of the verses of the Bhāgavatam which are found to be of an extra-ordinary value; many of those verses are quoted in the original Sanskrit language for the ready reference and appreciation of the reader.

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189 IPS, p.49 (parentheses mine)
PART - 1

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

OF SRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM
CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF THE SUPREME REALITY

Man’s endeavour of conceptualizing the Supreme Reality – God – is like forming an idea of what the ocean is merely by testing its water, touching and seeing its waves, or sailing a few miles across. Apparently similar to the idea of the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God that is popular in most of the religions of the world, and mainly relating to the Supreme Agency who creates the universe and governs it, the Bhāgavatam idea goes far beyond it to the mystical heights conjuring together the ideas as realized by the Vedic seers as well as the subsequent mystics who sanctified the length and breadth of this land of India.

The Bhāgavatam does not limit its idea of the Supreme Reality merely to an unseen Creator; hence, it often prefers to call that Reality as the Reality or the Truth (Satya), the Essence (Tattva), the Infinite (Ananta or Brahman), and by some other secular names. According to the Bhāgavatam, that Reality is one, eternal, serene, pure, of the nature of pure knowledge, beyond the reach of words and dualities, and eternally blissful. In honour of the convention, the Bhāgavatam often addresses that Reality as ‘masculine’ God, ‘He’, ‘Man’, ‘the Supreme Man’ etc, mostly describing Him as having the male body; however, the gender-specific Biblical idea of God is not the defining characteristic of the Supreme Reality according to the Bhāgavatam.

The ‘God’ of every religion finds a place in the idea of the Supreme Reality that the Bhāgavatam presents, without giving rise to any conflict. The Reality that the Bhāgavatam conceives of can be realized as the Pure Transcendental or as the Immanent Personal Being, as the Formless or as the One having a form. The Bhāgavatam, in tune with the other Hindu as well as the secular scriptures, conceptualizes God as the unborn (aja), infinite (ananta) and unfathomable (apara), and begins to sing...
His glory as manifested in His creative activities as well as enacted in His various incarnations with the motive of showing the underlying unity in the Reality, cultivating in the listener the motiveless love for God, consequently bringing in his life the peace and bliss that form the very nature of the Supreme Reality – God.

1. **Proofs for the existence of God:**

The *Bhāgavatam* is ‘the book of God’. Its motive is to sing the glory of God in order to cultivate divine love in the listener. The Book has taken shape in the backdrop of an imminent death of king Parikṣit who has the established faith in God and is keen to know the supreme duty of man. The time of narration as well as the stature of the listener neither demanded nor permitted the enquiry into the very elementary question, *viz.*, the proofs for the existence of God. Moreover, the *Bhāgavatam* considers God as unknowable (*avijnata, aprameya*). However, at several places in the *Bhāgavatam* there are references, which may be regarded as suggesting the proofs for the existence of God. For instance, the necessity of God as permanent substratum of the transient macrocosmic evolution as well as the levels of subjective consciousness, the intelligent agent behind the inert existence, or as the prime mover of everything or as the moral governor, are sufficient to show that the book is not dogmatic in accepting the existence of God. The proofs are not systematically elaborated on the lines of the traditional Indian ideas such as *sāmānyato dṛstānumāna-pramāṇa* corresponding the analogical reasoning of the modern logic, and the rest; however, they do correspond to those ideas and also to the Kantian teleological, cosmological and moral arguments. Relying on the *pramāṇa* of verbal testimony (*sabdā pramāṇa*), the *Bhāgavatam* deduces from the very attempt of the *Veda* to describe the nature of God, although negatively only, that a description by the authority such as the *Veda* verily entails the existence of God. Of course, these kinds of suggestions to establish

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195 IV, 29, 3  
196 IV, 11, 23  
197 II, 10, 7*  
198 II, 2, 35  
199 X, 85, 6  
200 IV, 21, 27  
201 based on the *Sāṅkhya-karika of Īśvara-kṛṣṇa*, 6 according to which the existence of the competent creator in case of the world can be inferred from the agent like the potter in case of a jar  
202 XI, 3, 36
the existence of God are not in the spirit of the Bhāgavatam since its author – sage Vyāsa – himself starts with the clear conviction and realization of the existence of God. The Book is 'of God' as the very name 'Śrīmad Bhāgavatam' suggests.

2. The nature of God:

God is indescribable (anirvacanīya or vāṅgmano' gocaram satyan) Reality, which is beyond name and form, words and thoughts. However, the Bhāgavatam generally understands the reality of God as 'the Absolute Pure, the only one, the knowledge – firm and unified, the Truth, total, without beginning, eternal, transcendental and non-dual'. He exists per se (ātma ādhāra). Knowing fully well that God can never be defined precisely, the Bhāgavatam tries to conceive of four defining characteristics of God: Satya-jñāna-Ananta-Ānandamātra – existence, knowledge, infinitude, and bliss form His nature; He is the eternal effulgence, ‘Satyam Brahma Cid bhāvān’ – Thou art the Truth-Infinite-Consciousness. These characteristics, in our opinion, describe God’s nature most precisely and appear to be the most universally acceptable ones.

1. God exists: Truth (Satya):

It is significant that the very first verse of the Bhāgavatam is the meditation on the Supreme Truth as the Transcendental and the Impersonal as well as the Immanent and the Personal Reality that exists per se, and in which all the four causes – material, efficient, formal and final – subsist. By definition, satyam means ‘truth, reality’; this definition ontologically entails the very existence of God. The Bhāgavatam defines satyam as the reality, which ‘is the causal substance that forms the material of the consequent effects, and which continues to be the same at the beginning and at the end

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203 XI,24,3
204 VI,16,21
205 XI,24,3
206 II,6,39 *
207 XI,9,17
208 X,13,54; X,28,15; T. Up,1,1,3
209 VIII,12,5
210 I,1,1 *
211 MWV; Apte
The definition clearly presupposes the transcendence of the causal matter — Truth — before and after the creation as well as immanence during the creation. It is in tune with the Śruti.213

Vira Raghava of the Viśisṭādvaita school, Suka Deva of Dvaitādvaita school of Nimbarka and Vallabha (Śuddhādvaita school) prefer to translate 'satya' in the first verse of the Bhāgavatam as Brahma; Vijayadhvaja of Dvaita school of Madhva translates 'satya' as Nārāyaṇa to suit his sectarian line of interpretation. Vallabha also likes to translate it as the Supreme Man (Mahāpurusa).214

As the Supreme Truth is both transcendental and impersonal as well as immanent and personal, the Bhāgavatam extols It and even seeks refuge in It thereby personifying It: Truth-willed, truth-formed and true in the three phases of time, Thou art the womb of truth and Thou art embedded in truth. The world that is perceived as real is established in Thy truth. Truth (satya) and Good (ṛtam) form Thy two eyes. We take refuge in Thee, the heart of truth.215

Taking cue from the Śrutis, the Bhāgavatam attributes the qualities of truth and goodness to the Supreme Truth because there is no trace of anything but truth in It; goodness is the benevolence that is inherent in the Supreme Truth. God is always considered as compassionate (parama kārupika) and benevolent (parama maṅgal).216

It may be worth a while to note, particularly in the light of the Bhāgavatam text considering Satya as the source of the Sattyam, the difference between Satya — the Truth and Sattyam, which the Śruti17 refers to as the amalgamation of the five elements — sat meaning earth, water, and fire whereas tyat meaning air and ether. Truth is the most universal and secular of all the epithets of God.
ii. God is Consciousness and Knowledge (Cid and Jñāna):

He is called *cinmātra*\(^{210}\) (or *cidghana*), *pratibodhamātram*,\(^{219}\) — the condensation of Pure Consciousness by nature. He is the fountain of consciousness (*cidatmakam*),\(^{220}\) that is, He makes everything conscious but none else can make Him conscious.\(^{221}\) He is *svayamjyoti* — self-luminous.\(^{222}\) God is Knowledge — *jñānam svatah*,\(^{223}\) *jñānaghaṇa*,\(^{224}\) *jñānatman*,\(^{225}\) *vijnānaghaṇa svarūpatah*,\(^{226}\) *vijnānamātra*.\(^{227}\) Consciousness is Knowledge; to be conscious of something is to be aware of it. God is, by nature, eternally aware of His reality. In other words, there is no ignorance in God. Therefore, the *Bhāgavatam* describes “He sees Himself even when nothing exists beside Himself”;\(^{228}\) that is He is conscious of Himself all the time whether in the state of creation or in the state of dissolution. Knowledge is His very nature, nay, all knowledge has its origin in God; therefore, He is called *sāṅkhyaśīras*.\(^{229}\) He is omniscient\(^{230}\) because He is omnipresent\(^{231}\), infinite and consciousness by nature.

Therefore, when one attains the knowledge of the Real Self, or say, when one becomes truly conscious of one’s Real Self that God is, one is said to have attained or seen God (*Brahmadarśana*).\(^{232}\)

iii. God is Infinite (Ananta):

The *Bhāgavatam* frequently calls the Supreme Reality as ‘*Brahma*’ or ‘*Para Brahma*’, ‘Ātman’ or ‘*Param Ātman*’. ‘*Brahma*’ and ‘Ātman’, are the Vedic names
of the Supreme Reality and connotative of the infinite, all-inclusive, transcendental, blissful, Absolute Reality\textsuperscript{233} (\textit{bhrad}—infinite).\textsuperscript{234} It is necessary to point out that by '\textit{Brahman}' or '\textit{Para Brahma}', the \textit{Bhāgavatam} understands as the total idea of God, and not merely the Impersonal (\textit{nirgūpa}) aspect of God that is often referred as \textit{Brahman} particularly by the \textit{Viśistādvaita}. This is clear from the description of \textit{Brahman} that the \textit{Bhāgavatam} gives. \textit{Brahman} is the origin; all subsist in It. The universe is born out of It, dissolves in It, is established in It, and is permeated by It through all transformations.\textsuperscript{235} Any description about It is bound to be insufficient, as It is infinite. It can be inferred and described only negatively through the process of 'not this, not this' (\textit{neti neti}).\textsuperscript{236}

\textbf{Agnosticism?} The Transcendental Reality God is beyond the reach of intellect and words, so the \textit{Vedas} also describe It through the process of negation only (\textit{neti neti}).\textsuperscript{237} Whatever the scriptures describe is the qualities that are in God, and not God's pristine nature.\textsuperscript{238} No one can know even the will of that latent and improvable Being; then, who can know who He is?\textsuperscript{239} The one who seeks to find out the limits of His inexhaustible excellences and activities is indeed a man of little understanding.\textsuperscript{240} Does this stance of the \textit{Bhāgavatam} tantamount to agnosticism? No. For, God, although transcendental and unknowable, is again everything that exists. He is unknowable in His entirety by virtue of His being everything; hence the limited mind of the devotee can worship Him in everything, sing the glory of the Infinite in infinite ways, and be filled up with the godliness. The aim of the \textit{Bhāgavatam} way of spiritual practice (henceforth referred to as '\textit{sādhanā}') is to realize the Supreme Reality in the depth of pure mind as the continuum like ether,\textsuperscript{241} shining free from all differences.\textsuperscript{242}

\textsuperscript{233} VIII, 12,7
\textsuperscript{234} MMW; Apel; also see VI, 4, 32 for definition (FN 262)
\textsuperscript{235} VI, 16, 22
\textsuperscript{236} X, 87, 41
\textsuperscript{237} II, 7, 47; X, 87, 41, XI, 3, 36
\textsuperscript{238} VI, 4, 29
\textsuperscript{239} IV, 11, 23
\textsuperscript{240} III, 13, 45
\textsuperscript{241} X, 63, 34
\textsuperscript{242} VIII, 7, 31 as quoted by Bhattacharya, p. 77
God cannot be known fully, but a sadhaka's mind can fully become Godly; hence there is no question of the Bhāgavatam being agnostic.

iv. God is Bliss (Ānanda):

Like infinitude, knowledge and consciousness, bliss is also the nature of God. In tune with the Taittiriya Up., which identifies Brahman with Rasa and Ānanda,\(^{243}\) the Bhāgavatam says that God is truth and bliss (satyam ānandanidhim),\(^{244}\) the unbroken bliss (ajasra sukham,\(^ {245}\) ānandamātr-am,\(^ {246}\)), the embodiment of the Supreme Bliss (Paramānandamūrti).\(^ {247}\)

Some philosophers find it difficult to postulate bliss as the nature of Brahman because, they argue, Brahman is ṛpta-kāma. The Bhāgavatam has an excellent explanation to offer in this regard: God is ṛpta-kāma\(^ {248}\) and has neither any urge nor any object external to It to attain. However, simultaneously, He is also called atmārāma\(^ {249}\) - the one deriving bliss from His own self. Thus, He has nothing to act in anyway in order to attain bliss, for bliss is His very nature. This bliss of God is wonderfully evinced in Mārkaṇḍeya's vision of the Lord Infant lying on a banyan leaf in the waters of deluge, sucking His uplifted toes placed in His mouth by Himself.\(^ {250}\) Again, the description of Rāsalīlā is the supreme example of His being atmārāma as Kṛṣṇa is described as dancing with each gopi taking multiple forms,\(^ {251}\) as also the indweller of every soul.\(^ {252}\) Thus, in fact, He was dancing with His own self. He partakes His own bliss; He needs no other extraneous agency to make Him blissful. He is the self-sufficient and eternal enjoyer. As His existence and bliss are of the transcendental nature, He is figuratively described as having been held up even by the banyan leaf afloat in the deluge water. The transcendental bliss is the beginningless and eternal nature of God. It is God's

\(^{243}\) rasavai satit, 'anando Brahmeti vyajanat'  
\(^{244}\) ll,1,39  
\(^{245}\) ll,7,48; X,14,23  
\(^{246}\) IV,9,16; IV,11,30  
\(^{247}\) VI,16,19  
\(^{248}\) X,47,46  
\(^{249}\) VI,16,19; etc.  
\(^{250}\) XII,9,20-25  
\(^{251}\) X,33,3  
\(^{252}\) X,33,36
The Concept of the Supreme Reality

consciousness, knowledge, and bliss that make the soul, who realize Godliness in his life, full of the experience of consciousness, knowledge and bliss.

v. God is Transcendental and Impersonal (Nirguna):
The Śruti texts are replete with the passages that refer to the Supreme Reality as nirguna. When the Bhāgavatam calls the Supreme Reality as nirguna – transcendental or unqualified, it only aims to describe Its pristine nature prior to the creation as it is contradictory to describe the Reality and simultaneously calling it as nirguna. When there is no creation, the Supreme Reality exists in Itself; hence, It is called transcendental (Nirguna Brahma). “Before creation this universe existed in no other form than the Lord...The Supreme Soul (ātmānam ātmā) did not appear then as the subject or as the object...He cast His eyes all around not to find anything other than His own self considering Himself, as if, non-existent.” This rather abstruse passage gives the impression as if nothing existed before the creation. But, the existence cannot come out of non-existence. Therefore, the Bhāgavatam very carefully describes Him in the same verse as the one whose potencies are latent, but He Himself is conscious (asupta drk).

The transcendental Supreme Reality is also compared to the void (sunya) and the sky in Its pristine state. Nevertheless, the Supreme Reality is not to be considered as vacuum on the line of the nihilists; for, God – Brahman – appears as the void by virtue of His being the subtlest of the subtle (suksmam aṣunyaṁ śunyakalpitam). He is compared to the sky because He is untainted by the subsequent creation just as the sky is untainted by the clouds or other objects that are seen in it. The Lord Himself says, “Before creation I alone was there, being no other existence of the nature of cause and effect different from me. Afterwards, also I alone exist. For, this is also my-

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253 Mund. Up., II, 1, 4; Cha. Up., III, 1, 4, 2, etc.
254 X, 85, 24*, etc.
255 III, 5, 23*-24
256 X, 87, 29;
257 IX, 9, 49
self, and what remains is also myself.”258* The Bhāgavatam replicates passages of similar purport as found in Ch. Up.259 and Brhad. Up.260.

This indicates the non-dualistic theism according to Prof. Sheridan.261

According to the Bhāgavatam, there are certain defining characteristics of the transcendental God who is the all-inclusive Supreme Reality. He is the source of all, the one, the infinite, the perfect, and the essence of bliss, in whom all contradictions co-exist.262 He is the meeting ground of two conflicting ideas.263* He is eternally non-dual, transcendental-infinite-Brahman.264* He is the soul of all, the root-matter (Prakṛti), Time, the Individual Being (also referred as Puruṣa), and the Transcendental Lord.265*

vi. God is Immanent and Personal (Saguṇa):

The Upaniṣads also refer to the Supreme Reality as saguṇa.266 Śvetāsvatara Up. is considered the precursor of the personal (saguṇa) idea that is crystallized in the Gītā, and later on in the Bhāgavatam as well as in other literature of the Bhāgavatism. The Reality (Rtami) is beyond duality, however, all dualities of the universe are attributed to It; nay, the Reality Itself is the universe.267 When the creation evolves out of the Supreme Reality, the Bhāgavatam calls Him as the Qualified (Saguṇa or Śabda) Brahma, Nārāyaṇa or Puruṣa, Purāṇa Puruṣa, Puruṣottama, or Puruṣārṣabha - Great Soul,268 and by the numerous other names of God. The cosmological enquiry necessitates the idea of God’s personality and His immanence in the creation. The universe is His body,269 He is called Viśvakāya, the one who has the universe as His
The Bhāgavatam repeats the Vedic verse of the similar purport, which considers the universe as the abode of the Ātman.²⁷⁰ He has innumerable designations; He is the Absolute Ruler (Iśa),²⁷¹ He is called Puruṣa because having created the universe (puram) He inhabits it as the immanent principle.²⁷² Therefore, the universe is also known as His body. He is called Ātman because He is the soul of everything and the giver of the soul to everyone.²⁷³ He is the Supreme Soul – Paramātman and Pu­ruṣottama because He is the Lord of all individual souls also referred as ātman and puruṣa. The idea that the world is the body of God, which formed an important part of the Viśistādvaita school of Vedānta, has its origin in the Śruti; hence it is unwarranted to conclude that the idea has been borrowed from the Viśistādvaita.

The Bhāgavatam does not restrict its concept of God either to the Impersonal Transcendental Brahman of the Upanisads, to Viṣṇu-Nārāyana-Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa of the epic literature, the Āgamas as well as the post-Sankara bhakti schools of Vedānta, and in the least to Iśvara – the relative reality of the Kevalādvaita. From the Bhāgavatam viewpoint, to define God exclusively as the Impersonal (nirguna) or as the Personal (saguna) is erroneous. God is the Transcendental Truth simultaneously immanent (Śabda Brahman)²⁷⁴ in the creation as the fountain of consciousness.²⁷⁵ According to the Bhāgavatam, the Supreme Reality is all-inclusive Essence. ‘That Supreme Essence is of the nature of knowledge, is one without the second, and is known as Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavān.’²⁷⁶

Jīva Goswami of the Caitanya School, however, prefers to differentiate among the three meanings that these epithets connote. According to him, Brahman is pure knowledge beyond everything, Paramātman is the internal controller having abundance of māyā-power, and Bhagavān is complete within Himself. Sridhara, on the

²⁷⁰ VIII,1,13
²⁷¹ VIII,1,10; Iśa Up.,1
²⁷² III,9; VI,9,44; VIII,22,20; XI,3,1; etc.
²⁷³ VII,14,37; XI,4,3
²⁷⁴ IV,31,13*
²⁷⁵ VI,14,51*
²⁷⁶ IV,9,15; III,32,36
²⁷⁷ I,2,11*;III,29,36
other hand, stresses non-duality in the Essence (Tattva).\textsuperscript{278} According to Sridhara, the respective adherents of the Upaniṣads, Yoga (Hairanyagarbha) and Sātvata cults give the same Reality different names.\textsuperscript{279}

In order to steer clear of all sectarian lines, the Bhāgavatam freely calls God at different times as Tattva (Essence) or as Satya (Truth),\textsuperscript{280} the epithets pregnant with the widest conceivable meaning. The Bhāgavatam also addresses God by any of the names such as Brahma,\textsuperscript{281} Para Brahma,\textsuperscript{282} Ātman,\textsuperscript{283} Paramātman,\textsuperscript{284} Cidātman,\textsuperscript{285} Puruṣa,\textsuperscript{286} Puruṣottama,\textsuperscript{287} Ajā,\textsuperscript{288} Adhokṣaja,\textsuperscript{289} Bhagavān, Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva, Śrī Viṣṇu, Isvāra,\textsuperscript{290} Parameśvara,\textsuperscript{291} Kṣetrajña\textsuperscript{292} and others without dividing Him into the Impersonal and the Personal,\textsuperscript{293} freely calling Him either Brahma – the Impersonal or Bhagavān – the Personal.\textsuperscript{294} The Bhāgavatam beautifully describes the Supreme Reality in one of the excellent verses as “knowledge, absolute purity, the real existence, the one, the one without inside and outside, the all-pervasive, the Peaceful, Brahma, the Truth, Bhagavān, and Vāsudeva.”\textsuperscript{295}

He has His inseparable potency, generally called, māyā\textsuperscript{296} with the help of which He lets the whole existence manifest just like a spider (makes web out of its own saliva).\textsuperscript{297}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{278} ATIM, FN, 1,2,11
\item \textsuperscript{279} Sridhara on 1,2,11 as quoted by Bhattacarya, p21
\item \textsuperscript{280} I,1,1; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{281} IV,24,60; IV,24,68; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{282} IV,31,17; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{283} IV,16,19; IV,24,70; IV,31,18; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{284} IV,9,5; IV,11,16; IV,24,68; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{285} I,3,30; VIII,3,2
\item \textsuperscript{286} II,6,41; III,25,17; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{287} III,29,12; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{288} V,11,13; VII,1,6; III,10,4; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{289} III,12,19; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{290} III,32,26; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{291} IV,29,44; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{292} V,11,13; VIII,3,13; etc.
\item \textsuperscript{293} III,32,36
\item \textsuperscript{294} III,28,41
\item \textsuperscript{295} V,12,11
\item \textsuperscript{296} III,7,16; III,21,19
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
sustains it, and devours it.\textsuperscript{296} Again, by His eternal knowledge He sets aside \textit{māyā} (as His functionality) and remains actionless.\textsuperscript{299} He is not the doer; \textit{māyā} His potency does on His behalf.\textsuperscript{300} “Transcending all relative existence, high and low, He exists as Boundless Freedom and the Ocean of Pure Consciousness-Bliss.”\textsuperscript{301}

He is the all-pervading spirit, soul of all, the original Being (\textit{Puruṣā}), the self-conscious effulgence, without birth, the Supreme Lord, the director and support of all, possessor of all excellences; he controls all souls by His potency (\textit{māyā}) as the indweller.\textsuperscript{302} He is not the passive controller of the universe. God is immanent in the world, and as the Immanent One, He governs the soul\textsuperscript{303} and the world permeating through them. As the \textit{Sutrātman} He enlivens the soul, and as the active, benevolent Lord He has compassion over His creation – He is very much personal. God is the dispenser of blessings, and it is from Him that the results of \textit{svadharma} accrue.\textsuperscript{304} He is the source of all blessings;\textsuperscript{305} He is the giver of all the four \textit{Puruṣārthas}.\textsuperscript{306} He possesses all majesties, which He dispenses for the well being of His creation. He is the friend (\textit{suhrda}) of all and dear to his devotees.\textsuperscript{307} He is Mother, Father, Friend, Lord and the Guru.\textsuperscript{308} He is the real Soul of all, the benevolent and always eager to bless all.\textsuperscript{309} Therefore, the same God is to be adored with devotion by all – the desirous, the desireless or the liberation-seekers.\textsuperscript{310}

In one of the best passages, the \textit{Bhāgavatam} freely addresses God by His impersonal as well as personal names marvelously describing His nature, His relationship with the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{297} I,2,30; II,9,26-27; III,21,19; XI,9,21; etc.
\textsuperscript{298} IV,11,26\textsuperscript{*}
\textsuperscript{299} II,5,13; II,7,47\textsuperscript{*}
\textsuperscript{300} II,10,45
\textsuperscript{301} XI,9,18 transl. S.I.
\textsuperscript{302} V,11,13\textsuperscript{*}
\textsuperscript{303} X,87,30
\textsuperscript{304} II,7,49
\textsuperscript{305} IV,24,42
\textsuperscript{306} VII,7,48; III,21,21; IV,8,60
\textsuperscript{307} III,9,22
\textsuperscript{308} I,11,7\textsuperscript{*}
\textsuperscript{309} X,87,22
\textsuperscript{310} II,3,10\textsuperscript{*}
\end{footnotesize}
devotee and the ultimate destination of sadhana, "AUM, Narayana (the indweller of all), Vāsudeva (the support of all), the Original and Supreme Person, possessor of all glory, auspiciousness, goodness, and mercy, the Absolute, the Substratum, the protector and Ruler of the world, the consort of Laksmi; through deep meditation, and purity of mind accompanied by the life of the supreme swan (discriminating person) Thy presence is revealed in the heart of the devotee as the inherent bliss of Ātman."  

This idea of a very personal Godhood makes way for the grace of God, which in turn is the root of the doctrine incarnation. Thus, the Bhāgavatam tries to maintain God's transcendence even during the process of creation showing how God can be both transcendental and immanent simultaneously. We will consider the concept of māyā, which explains the immanence and personality of God, in a detail a little later on.

vii. Chief epithets of God describing His nature:

God is transcendental; therefore, any description of God is the description of His qualities only. However, all qualities originate in Him; therefore, He can be described and worshipped in innumerable ways with the help of those qualities. The Bhāgavatam applies numerous adjectives or epithets, each of which is demonstrative of its perception of the Supreme Reality that can never be fully described; however, each of them tries to express the nature of God and that God can be best described if all of them and many more accommodate each other. In this regard, the Bhāgavatam takes the lesson from the Viśisṭādvaita according to which in order to get the perfect weight of the bilva fruit, all its parts – shell, seeds, pulp, juice, fibres – should be put together.

We try to consider some of those, which are most frequently used in the Bhāgavatam. They reflect not only the depth of the idea of God that the Bhāgavatam has but also demonstrate how the Bhāgavatam has so eclectically assimilated the gamut of ideas of God that it inherited from the Vedic as well as the non-Vedic philosophies and religious systems originating in the different times and in different corners of this land. These epithets describe God's nature as viewed in reference to His relationship with the world, in general, and with the individual soul in particular.

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vi.9,33
a. Puruṣa, Puruṣottama, Ātman, and Paramātman:

Puruṣa, Puruṣottama, Ātman, and Paramātman are among the most used epithets of God in the Bhāgavatam. 'Puruṣa' owes its origin to the Rg-vedic hymn 'Puruṣa suktā' \[^{312}\] and usually connotes the cosmic form of the transcendental Reality. It is the first discrete form of God also known as Virāt or Virāj. \[^{313}\] By puruṣa, the Bhāgavatam understands 'the one who inhabits the city'. The individual soul known as ātman is also known as puruṣa by virtue of being embodied whereas God is known by the same name by virtue of being immanent in the creation, which is, as seen, considered as His body and He as the soul (ātman) of the universe. “That Puruṣa is the beginningless Ātman. He is not constituted of the guṇas of Prakṛti. He is distinct from and superior to Prakṛti; while he reveals everything into its distinctness, he himself is self-revealing requiring no other revealer. He has brought forces of evolution together and set them in motion.” \[^{314}\] He is the indweller and unseen director of everything. \[^{315}\]

In order to differentiate between the two connotations of Ātman and Puruṣa, the Supreme Reality is often known as Puruṣottama or Puruṣarshha\[^{316}\]—the best of the puruṣas or as Ādi Puruṣa\[^{317}\] or Purāṇa Puruṣa\[^{318}\]—the original Being or as Paramātman—the Supreme Self. By Puruṣottama, the Bhāgavatam would not understand God, like Yogasūtra of Patanjali, merely as “the special Puruṣa, untouched by misery, actions, their results, and desires”. \[^{319}\] He is the Supreme Person of infinite glory, the creator, preserver and the destroyer of the creation, the inner controller of all beings and whose true nature and ways cannot be apprehended through the intellect; He is the moral governor who dispels the afflictions of the good, who destroys the wicked, who is the embodiment of perfect goodness and who bestows the knowledge of the self upon the highest order of the recluses (Paramahānisas). \[^{320}\] He is Puruṣottama in

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\[^{312}\] Rg Veda, X, 90
\[^{313}\] I,3,1-5; II,23-29; II,5,35-42; III,ch-6; XII,3,4 etc.
\[^{314}\] III,26,3 transl. S.T.; III,25,17
\[^{315}\] II,4,12
\[^{316}\] III,32,13
\[^{317}\] IV,9,15*; II,6,38*; etc.
\[^{318}\] III,5,49; II,9,25; III,32,10; IV,24,42; etc.
\[^{319}\] RY
\[^{320}\] II,4,12-13; IV,6,45
the sense that He is the cause and master of both – the spirit and the matter, also known as the purusa and Prakrti or Pradhāna. In the same way Paramātman, which means the Supreme Self, also refers to the same Reality as Puruṣottama; the attempt of certain sectarian teachers to ontologically differentiate between ātman and Paramātman does not find favour with the Bhāgavatam. In the true spirit of the Śruti, the Bhāgavatam reiterates that ātman is Paramātman. Again, Paramātman is both ātman and anātman. “He – the Truth – became two; of these, one is Purusa, the center of consciousness and the other is Prakrti, with its manifest and latent states”. Conforming to its Vedic allegiance, the Bhāgavatam also calls the two as Śiva and Śakti. They are the basic creative principles originating in the Supreme Reality, which exists per se even before the creation. Purusa and Prakrti, though born out of Him, are non-different from him. Prakrti is the substance (upādāna) of the creation; Purusa is the Master (ādhāra) or the governor of Prakrti. Time is the factor that manifests the effect out of cause; and all these are God – the Supreme Brahman. He is the Absolute Reality.

The fundamental difference of the Purusa of the Bhāgavatam from that of Sāṅkhya is that the Bhāgavatam admits one Purusa as the real all-pervading soul as against the view of the later that there are infinite purusas. According to the former, the individual phenomenal selves are but the delusive confusion of the universal Purusa with the transformations of the Matter (Prakrti) and the consequent erroneous identification of those with the universal Purusa.

Vijayadhvaja defines ‘purusa’ as the bestower of perfect bliss.

b. Bhagavān-Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva:
Bhagavān, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva are very significant epithets of God that the Bhāgavatam has a preference for. ‘Bhagavān’ means the possessor of six qualities,
vіz., knowledge or pure consciousness (jñāna), power or independence of activity (aśvārya), prowess or potency to become the material cause of the world (śakti), supremacy or fatiguelessness or power to sustain (bala), energy or unaffectedness (vīrya), and splendour or self-sufficiency (teja). The six are also enumerated as oja, bala, vīrya, śaurya, śrī and yaśa.

‘Vāsudeva’, when applied directly to God, conveys the meaning of His being the Purest Essence (sattvam viśuddham); subjectively applied the term means the pure individual consciousness (citta), which abounds in the quality of sattva, is pure and free from passion and is the place where one can realize God. God is called Vāsudeva not only because He was born of Vasudeva in His incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, but also because Vāsudeva means “the indweller” (vas=to inhabit); also, at several places, address Him as Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva is the substratum of all and therefore, He is the end (gati) of all.

In the Pāñcarātra context, Nārāyaṇa is the form of God with four or eight arms, usually accompanied by His consort Śrī and other servitors, either reclining on the bed of Ananta – the serpent, standing, or seated on the throne or on the shoulder of Garuḍa – the eagle. Although the Bhāgavatam worships these forms also, it does not apply the epithet exclusively to any of these forms; in stead, it prefers to call Him in one of these forms as Bhagavān, Hari and Mādhava. The Bhāgavatam extols God in His cosmic form addressing Him as Bhagavān, Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa. For the Bhāgavatam, Nārāyaṇa is a name of the Supreme Reality and can be interchanged for any of the epithets of the Supreme Reality like Vāsudeva, Bhagavān, Hari and others as noted above. Therefore, the Bhāgavatam extols Nārāyaṇa - Vāsudeva in the equal
tone: The *Vedas* owe their existence to *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*, the gods are aspects of *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*, all the worlds are manifestations of *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*, all worship is inspired by *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*, all spiritual paths (Yogas) become meaningful in *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*, the spiritual efforts (tapas) become significant only due to *Nārāyaṇa*, and the final destination (gath) of all is also *Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva*.  

Goswami Girdharalala of *Suddhādvaita* School explains in reference to the above-mentioned verse (the *Bhāgavatam*, V,12,11) that 'knowledge' means "Brahman"; in the path of devotion (Bhakti-yoga), it is designated as *Bhagavān*, the venerable Lord, the possessor of six excellences, and *Vāsudeva*. Vijayadhvaja of *Dvaita* School derives the term 'Vāsudeva' from 'vas' meaning 'to dwell', although he concedes to the popular etymology 'the son of Vāsudeva'.

Sridhara distinguishes among the three names of God, viz., *Nārāyaṇa, Brahman*, and *Paramātman* attributing each with an aspect of Reality – *Nārāyaṇa* as the creator of the universe, *Brahman* as the eternal existence in all states of consciousness, *samādhi*, etc. and *Paramātman* as the animator of the body, vital breath, etc. Ekanatha, however, is of the opinion that the three names connote the same meaning.

As if in order to steer clear of the gratuitous sectarian lines thereby to establish its universal approach, the *Bhāgavatam* freely calls God as *Bhagavan, Vāsudeva, Nārāyaṇa, Puruṣa, Ātmā, Kṣetrajña* etc. in a single verse.

'Dharma' is a very significant epithet from the viewpoint of *sādhanā*. It refers to God's nature of being the law. The *rtam* of the *Vedas* corresponds to 'dharma' of the *purāṇas*. Considering every law as God's form, the *sādhaka* is to resign (prapatt) his own will to whatever the law (dharma) suggests. Among other noteworthy epithets, which describe God, are, *Kṣetrajña* – the knower within the body, *Sarvādyakṣa* – the lord of all, *Sākṣi* – the witness of all, *Ātma-mūla* – the source of *Ātman* and that of *Prakṛti* – the root matter.
c. Time:
Time (kāla) is described in more than one ways in the Bhāgavatam. Time was there when at the end of the creative cycle, there evolved the creation out of the blinding darkness of Tamas.\(^{342}\) In the creative process, God out of his will and though his own māyā, assumed Time along with the Action and Nature, which appeared in him.\(^{343}\) Time, then, was instrumental in the imbalance in the three basic qualities etc.\(^{344}\) In the creative process, ‘the running Time’ is considered as the support for Puruṣa and Pradhāna.\(^{345}\) Time is the cause of creation and destruction.\(^{346}\) It is verily the reality in the form of Time that is hinted by ‘the wheel of the chariot of God’ (Īśvara-rathacarana)\(^{347}\) and ‘the wheel of the mundane existence’ (samsāra-cakra).\(^{348}\) The worlds and its guardian deities live and act in spite of their will due to God in the form of Time.\(^{349}\) God as Time is the cause of the power of mind, senses, organs, vital breaths as well as liberation and death.\(^{350}\) All beings and elements are subject to his control just like a wooden doll or a mechanical toy-deer (are controlled by the showman or the mechanism).\(^{351}\) Time is responsible for bringing people together and parting them.\(^{352}\) Hence, Time is called Bhagavān\(^{353}\) in the sense of the time sequence and in the sense of death.\(^{354}\) Time is indeed referred as the sequence of events in terms of year etc. related to the movements of the sun.\(^{355}\) Time is referred in the sense of the destiny (daiva).\(^{356}\) Time is one of the twelve witnesses of jīva.\(^{357}\) Time is considered as

\(^{342}\) VII, 3, 26
\(^{343}\) II, 5, 21*
\(^{344}\) II, 5, 22
\(^{345}\) VIII, 1, 11
\(^{346}\) IV, 12, 3
\(^{347}\) V, 8, 9
\(^{348}\) VI, 17, 18
\(^{349}\) VI, 12, 8
\(^{350}\) VI, 12, 9
\(^{351}\) VI, 12, 10
\(^{352}\) VI, 15, 3
\(^{353}\) III, 30, 1-2
\(^{354}\) VIII, 3, 31; III, 9, 17; IV, 11, 19
\(^{355}\) III, ch-11; III, 21, 18; V, 20, 30; XII, 4, 2; XII, 12, 46;
\(^{356}\) VII, 2, 52; X, 54, 14
\(^{357}\) VI, 1, 42
God’s potency (śakti) movement, power (vīrya) and dynamism (kalā). God is known as having the form of Time (kalatmanah). Nay, the same Reality is puruṣa as an inner controller of man and Time as the external universe. God is described as Time and also as Action (Karma), Nature (Svabhāva), Destiny (Daiva), and Desire (Kāma).

In short, the Bhāgavatam understands Time as,

1. the time sequence.
2. God’s will in the sense of destiny (daiva or kāla-niyāntra) [destiny is also understood in the sense of man’s actions, which is again an offshoot of the law of Karma (the law of causation) and the principle of time sequence].
3. the potency of God, equated with Māyā (sometimes also considered as a part of it).
4. a form of God.
5. God himself, in its characteristic spirit of monism with which the Bhāgavatam equates every part of the creation with the reality of God.

**d. Time and God’s will:**
The consideration of Time as God presents a great universal idea of the Ultimate Reality. The idea expands beyond the three dimensions of the perceptible matter and its forms to include ‘the fourth dimension of the modern physics’ also. From the viewpoint of sādhana, a sādhaka is to see God not only in everything that is spatial, but also to feel the touch of God in every event that is temporal. This is the philosophy of God-will. Everything happens on the stage of Time – the form of God hence, there is no room for anything that could be conceived as ultimately undivine. The Bhāgavatam takes the monism to the new mystical heights not only as summum bonum, but
also as an utmost positive way of living. Before a sādhaka realizes ‘sarvam viṣṇumaya- 

ym jagat’, he has to see God’s will in all that happens. God being all veracious, aus­

picious and benevolent (param maṅgala, param kārupika), everything that happens 

has to be for the ultimate good.

3. GOD AS EVERYTHING AND THE PROBLEM OF THE ONE AND THE MANY:

The contradicting currents are apparently visible in the Bhāgavatam explanation of 

the problem of the One and the many. They are the Realism, Absolutism and Panthe­

ism with regard to the existence and nature of the world. The keen observation 

of teachings of the Bhāgavatam, however, dispels these contradictory postulates, and 

through such observation, one can discern the clear meaning of the Bhāgavatam, 

which is reconciliation of all these currents.

i. Realism:

The Bhāgavatam considers the universe as real because it is the body of God.

Everything is real because everything is God’s (Viśvātma) manifestation as ‘many’ in 

the form of categories, just as one fire manifests as many fires according to the fuels in 

which it enters. “The Sky, fire, water, earth, celestial luminaries, living beings, quar­

ters, trees, rivers, oceans – all the Nature should be recognized as the body of Hari 

and greeted with prostrations.”

ii. Absolutism and Illusionism:

The reality status of the world is as false as dream or reverie and its reality is base­

less. It is only Ātman that shines as many just as ether, air, fire, water or earth ap­

pear differently in their different effects (like pot in case of earth, etc.). Thus, the 

universe is a false appearance on Ātman. The universe did not exist before its crea­

tion, it will not exist after dissolution, hence it cannot be said to be real now also.

The universe was non-existent before creation and will not exist after the dissolution;
in the intervening period, it appears to be real, only because it is superimposed on the Absolute Reality; therefore, it is compared to the modifications of material substances.\footnote{373} This entire universe – past, present and future – is no other than the Supreme Person (Purusa).\footnote{374} Whatever can be thought about and uttered is Brahman; how can the feet of men placed anywhere be regarded as not placed on the earth?\footnote{375}

### iii. Pantheism:

Whatever the mind, words, eyes, and other senses grasp, all that is God and there is nothing but God.\footnote{376} God alone exists eternally; there is nothing – with or without attributes – beside God, even soul as well as the Matter and its adjuncts are nothing but God (although He is beyond the reach of both – the cause and effect).\footnote{377} God is the only existence that ever was, that will be and, in between, that is [although He appears as many through the adjuncts of ignorance (grunas) only].\footnote{378} Just as the same gold appears as the ornaments, God also manifests as this multitudinous existence.\footnote{379}

These passages suggest that the world is very much God – not merely as His body but as His very being. Among these seemingly conflicting ideas lies the solution of the problem of the One and the many. The problem of the many refers to the how and why of the cosmogonical enquiry to which no system of thought has irrefutably given the solution. The Bhāgavatam approaches the problem from two angles: metaphysics and epistemology.

### iv. Metaphysical solution:

The Bhāgavatam unhesitatingly concedes it to be a real mystery, which can be conceptually resolved only through the acceptance of ‘Māyā’. Māyā is but a name of God given to Him so that one does not mistakenly conceive Him as bound in the process of unfolding of the manifoldness. God retains His transcendence even on being immanent in the world.\footnote{380} With the help of māyā (or Yogamāyā) God projects the
The Concept of the Supreme Reality

multiplicity on Him, sustains it and dissolves it at a definite time.\textsuperscript{381} The root cause of the universe is to be traced not outside \textit{māyā}.\textsuperscript{382} Thus, the \textit{Bhāgavatam} tries to solve the problem of the One and many with the metaphysical entity of \textit{māyā}.

\textbf{v. Epistemological solution:}

According to the \textit{Bhāgavatam}, it is due to ignorance that one ascribes reality to the maniness-in-itself.\textsuperscript{383} Ignorance has the locus in the ego (\textit{ahāṅkāra}) of the soul.\textsuperscript{384} Ego manifests as one's identification with body and the actions. When the knot of ego is severed with the sword of knowledge then, one realizes the real Self.\textsuperscript{385} When the \textit{Bhāgavatam} says that the universe is to be treated as illusion, it means that the world has no existence independent of God,\textsuperscript{386} and that it appears as real because of ignorance\textsuperscript{387} just as the cloth cannot be seen apart from the fibres of the cloth.\textsuperscript{388} Thus, for the ignorant, the microcosmic and macrocosmic diversities exist,\textsuperscript{389} but in the light of knowledge the multiplicity of numbers disappear,\textsuperscript{390} just as maniness of ornaments disappear in to one gold.\textsuperscript{391} \textit{Krṣṇa} demonstrates to \textit{Brahma} the fact, which is known only to the seers that God manifests as many. \textit{Krṣṇa} was alone; then He became calves and cowherd boys (as a fact of ignorance); then (as a fact of realization) He became four-armed forms of \textit{Nārāyaṇa} and lastly as the One \textit{Brahman}.\textsuperscript{392}

If this epistemological solution is not accepted, one might land into believing the \textit{Bhāgavatam} doctrine either as grossly idealistic or as grossly realistic. It is important to note that even while considering the world as real – either as God's body or as His being, the \textit{Bhāgavatam} maintains that the world can not be real like \textit{Brahman}, merely on the basis of \textit{satkāryavāda} because, the concomitance between the cause and the
effect is not always observed (as in case of father and son); moreover, there are false perceptions (as in case of snake being perceived in a rope).\textsuperscript{393} The \textit{Bhāgavatam} clearly says that just as fire is different from the burning faggot as well as smoke, \textit{Bha-gavān}, who is also known as \textit{Brahman}, is distinct (prthak) from \textit{Prakṛti} and all its categories as well as from the souls (jīva or self).\textsuperscript{394} He is everything and the cause of all effects but He is different from all things in essence.\textsuperscript{395} Even though He is the Lord of \textit{Sat} and \textit{Asat}, He is different from both.\textsuperscript{396} Suka Deva belonging to the \textit{Dvaitād-vaita} school of Nimbarka holds that the just-mentioned verse asserts the difference-cum-non-difference (bhedabheda) relation between the world and the \textit{Brahman}. The \textit{Bhāgavatam} also agrees to this view: Although the \textit{Vedas} attribute the authorship of the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe to God, He is not the doer, nor conditioned in any way (by māyā); He is everything, the cause of all effects but, essentially different from all things.\textsuperscript{397} However, Goswami Giridharalal of \textit{Śuddhād-vaita} School emphasizes that this world of causal relationship is identical with the Lord. He is essentially transcendental to the world (prapāñcā). However, since the world is God’s and identical with Him, the notion of difference is unreal.

“\textit{Sarvam Viṣṇumayam Jagat},” according to the \textit{Bhāgavatam}, is the state of the realized one. Until then, the world can be considered as transitory just as the \textit{jñāna-mārga} as well as the \textit{Kevalādvaita} suggests, or God should be seen in everything in the world that is to be considered as His body totally dependent on God just as the \textit{Viśistādvaita} and the other schools of \textit{bhakti-mārga} suggest. The later is preferred by the \textit{Bhāgavatam} and considered as the best means of \textit{sādhanā}, since the former is prone to producing depression (\textit{klesayukta}) as \textit{Krṣṇa} in the \textit{Gita}\textsuperscript{398} says. In the \textit{Bhāgavatam Krṣṇa} preaches \textit{Uddhava}, “of all the means of spiritual disciplines, the best is to practise His presence in everything through mind, speech and action.”\textsuperscript{399}

\textsuperscript{393} X,87,36
\textsuperscript{394} III,28,40
\textsuperscript{395} V,18,5s
\textsuperscript{396} VII,9,31*; BG, IX,4-5
\textsuperscript{397} V,18,5
\textsuperscript{398} B.G.,XII,5
\textsuperscript{399} XI,29,19*
The realized one experiences and the śādāka tries to practise the fact that "whatever is grasped by the mind, words, eyes and other senses, all that is God and there is nothing but God." Keeping this knowledge in mind śādāka always detaches self from the unreal multiplicity of the world. Although God alone manifests as the many, the wise recognizes God alone behind the unreal multiple forms, never the world because the wise one sees it as transitory (naśvara). This is why Kṛṣṇa emphatically disapproves the deification of the vibhūtis. Thus, the Bhāgavatam admits the levels of consciousness in the experience of ‘All is God’; hence, its idea of God may not be termed as purely pantheistic.

To conclude, the Bhāgavatam grants the reality status to the many as the manifestation of the One. The many is real only as long as the ignorance persists just as a reflection, an echo and an illusory object, although ultimately unreal, react on the subject, and not ultimately real as Viśiṣṭādvaita admits. For, when the ignorance is overcome, there remains no difference among various objects or between the subject and the object; what is perceived is only the Supreme Reality. This seems to be the best solution to the problem of the One and the many. The Bhāgavatam believes in God, the One, alone as the ultimate Reality, while granting only the relative status to His māyā (which includes Devaśakti, Ātmaśakti and Karmaśakti) – the cause of the many, and considers their relationship in such a way that the relative and dependent reality of the many is acknowledged only within the metaphysically independent reality of the One, and that too until the supreme knowledge dawns in a person. The Bhāgavatam, while allegorically describing the world as the body of God, differs from the Kevalādvaita and the Viśiṣṭādvaita for, the Bhāgavatam neither takes exclusively the Kevalādvaita stand of adhyāsavāda considering the creation as all-the-time illusion nor the Viśiṣṭādvaita stand of aprthaksiddhi considering the creation as all-the-time real. The Bhāgavatam takes a unique but utmost rational and universally acceptable position while describing the nature of the creation and its relationship with God.

400 XI, 13, 24
401 XI, 87, 19
402 V, 18, 4; XI, 7, 7
403 XI, 28, 5
404 XI, 28, 6-7
The universe is universe because its support is the One who is the one without the second.

Prof. Sheridan rightly observes that the theistic passages of the Book propose non-dualism in the contexts which support the reality of the world and of the individual self; the position of the Bhāgavatam is explicitly non-dualistic and implicitly difference-in-identity. Difference-in-identity is the implicit structure, which allows the Absolute to be one and many at the same time.\(^{405}\)

4. THE FORM AND THE FORMLESSNESS OF GOD:

God, as the transcendental Being, is beyond name and form (anāma rūpa).\(^{406}\) He is the formless (amūrtikam),\(^{407}\) non-symbolic (aliṅgam).\(^{408}\) Being infinite, He is also figuratively described as the one having an ether-like form (nabholiṅgam,\(^{409}\) ākāśa liṅgam, vyomavat\(^{410}\)). The Upaniṣads also know the Supreme Reality as having the ether-like form. The Brahmaśūtras reiterate it.\(^{411}\) According to the Bhāgavatam, the form of the formless (arūpa) God whose true constitution is the Consciousness (cidatman) has been created in the individual soul (ātman) by the attributes of māyā such as intelligence and others.\(^{412}\) Just as a stream of clouds is attributed to the sky or the dust is ascribed to the wind, similarly the quality of being seen is attributed to the Seer by unintelligent ones.\(^{413}\)

God’s form and nature when He is alone in himself, prior and posterior to all that is, are inconceivable. Therefore, He is mystically described in that state as himself having thought that He was non-existent (on manifestation level).\(^{414}\) By His will, He manifested and assumed all forms that exist. Therefore, the Bhāgavatam does not conceive Him exclusively as having a form (and least as having a particular form to the exclu-
sion of any other form) or as the formless, just as it does not conceive Him exclusively as the Personal or as the Impersonal. The Bhāgavatam declares that none knows how He is nirguṇa and again suddha sattva endowed with excellences like virtue, knowledge, dispassion, lordliness, powers etc... However, the sages imagine a particular form in order to facilitate the meditation on God.

i. The Sound (Nāda), the Word or the Logos:

The Bhāgavatam goes back to the Śruti text: ‘Prajāpatīr vai idam agre āsit, Tasya vāg dvitiya āsit, Vāg vai Paramam Brahma’ which also finds expression in the Gospel of St. John: ‘And the Word was with God, and the Word was God’. With the cultured religiosity, the man started worshipping the Supreme Reality in multifarious ways. As the element sound is the first among the subtle elements to appear – its locus being the ether which again is the first among the gross elements to appear – so does God first manifests within the space of the heart of the yogi in the form of Sphoṭa (also called parā aspect of sound) – the inarticulate sound. The Sound (Nāda) or the Logos was among the first of the forms, after the nature-worship, in which God was worshipped. The linguistic advancement gave a rather more distinct form to the philosophy of the Sound, and it took the form of Word (Śabda); hence, the personal (saguṇa) aspect of God is known as Śabda Brahma. Sphoṭa is the Śabda Brahma, changeless and limitless in power, proceeding from Para Brahma. Sphoṭa cannot be conceptualized hence, Sphoṭa further manifests as Nāda or Ghosa (also called paśyanti aspect of sound) – the articulate sound. But, Nāda is also out of the conceptual periphery of the sādhaka who still exerts to transcend the materiality of his being. The articulate sound that further got extended is known as the Praṇava AUM (also called Antah-Praṇava or madhyamā aspect of sound which is conceivable); so,

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415 V,20,40; V,25,10
416 V,18,33
417 X,85,9; XI,21,38
418 XII,6,37
419 XI,21,36
420 XI,21,37-38
421 X,85,9
422 XII,4,39; XI,21,39; X,85,9
423 Bhattacharya, 1982, p. 193 quotes Vamsidhara in this regard
all aspirants can easily meditate on it for attaining the knowledge of the Supreme Truth. AUM is verily indicative of Brahman, Param Ātman, Bhagavān. Hence, it is called Brahma bijam or brahmākṣara.424 The Bhāgavatam, in tune with the Śruti, considers AUM or Prapava as a form of God.425 AUM is only one of the names or symbols of God. God revealed Himself unto Brahmā, who had withdrawn after the intense search for his origin, as the sound ‘TAPA’.426 The age of mantras followed with the development of the culture of sacrifices, and God began to be worshipped in the form of the mantras; hence, the Bhāgavatam calls Him as mantramūrti.427 The Vedas bear testimony to this kind of worship, which was nurtured by the Aryans.

According to Vira Raghava, Śabda Brahma means the form known only from the description in the five Upanisads and possessing all excellences; according to Vijayadhvaja, it is full of excellent attributes to be known from the Vedic texts. Visvanatha Cakravarty, however, thinks that it is manifesting form of sat, cit and ānanda.428

ii. The Natural phenomena, the Designs or Graphics (Yantras), animism, and totems:

The establishment of detailed procedures of sacrifice and worship brought with them various ideas of forms in which the divinity could be worshipped; they ranged from the natural phenomena such as fire (which is among the first ones to command the status of the divinity), water, etc., or the graphics also known as yantras by the Tantras later on, or the images of earth, wood, stone etc.,429 or the animistic forms such as Fish (Matsya), Swan (Hamsa), Tortoise (Kurma), Alligator (Makara), Boar (Varāha), Horse (Vājīn), Man-lion (Nyṣimha), Man-horse (Hayagrīva) etc. Jaiswal has done full justice to the development of the animistic forms into the incarnations.430 The Bhāgavatam clearly hints at the fusion of the Vedic and the Tantric mode of worship.431

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424 II,1,17
425 cf. YS, 1,27-29 ‘tasya vācakd) prapava’
426 II,9,6
427 I,5,38
428 III,21,8
429 XI,20,27-28
430 Jaiswal, pp.131-138
431 VIII,6,9
It is interesting to note that many of the civilised societies such as the Japanese who practice the Shinto religion still worship the Supreme Reality in one or the other form of the nature. The yantras form the important part of worship in many a Buddhist sects. The Zoroastrians worship the Supreme Reality in the Fire. The Islam worships the Formless but the Personal (Saguna) Allah. It is the grandeur and the universality of the Bhāgavatam that it takes into consideration all the forms of God and most of the forms of worship.

iii. The anthropomorphic form of God:

In India, the anthropomorphic worship is also the gift of the Vedic era. The Supreme Reality began to be worshipped as the Cosmic Man (Puruṣa or the Virāt Puruṣa) on the basic instinct of the man to relate the microcosm to the macrocosm (yathā piṅgū tathā brahmānḍe nyāya). The Puruṣa sukta of the Rg-veda extols the Supreme Reality as having a human form although with a thousand heads, hands, feet, and other limbs to indicate His infinitude. The Bhāgavatam adopts, in ditto, this form of God for worship. Puruṣāvatāra or the Virāt, conceived as the first discrete form of God, is made up of the basic elements (tattva), and is the seed and the receptacle of all the subsequent forms in the creation. It is the formal cause of the creation.

Sridhara is of the opinion that though the Supreme Spirit has no such human form, for the convenience of meditation and worship, He is regarded as Virāt (one residing in or knowing the affairs of sentient beings). Vallabha, one of the most rationalist and secular of scholars, agrees with Sridhara and further says that the body of the Virāt allegorically described as the human male form, consists of Pure Sattva, and is composed of the basic principles (tattvas). Vijayadhvaja stretches the idea of the form of God to universal level by considering even the forms of God's incarnations such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa etc. on par with the Cosmic form of God. According to Jiva Goswami, Puruṣa implies three forms of Viṣṇu, as (i) the creator of the principle of Intelligence, (Mahat) (ii) the latent Being in the cosmic Egg (Hiranyakarṣṭha), and (iii) the Being in all elements and beings (bhūtas).
However, it is clear from the description of God's form of Virāt as found in the Bhāgavatam that the form is conceived by the worshippers according to their idea of God and their preferences; the ācāryas concur with this view. The devotees adore God differently in different ages.435 For instance, in the Kṛta Yuga, He is worshipped as the fair-complexioned Brahmacārī;436 in the Treta, as the red-complexioned Yajapati;437 in the Dvāpara, as the blue-complexioned Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa or Vāsudeva438 and in the Kali, as the black-complexioned one439 – Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and as other arcāvatāras. Thus, God is said as taking the form according to the concept and tendencies of the devotees, just as air, which adopts the odour of whatever it is in contact with.440

iv. The purpose of God's form:

Even though He transcends name and form,441 God assumes the form, which is an expression of knowledge and bliss, out of grace unto the devotees,442 so that they can contemplate on the august form of God in their heart-lotus purified by loving devotion.443 God's form, which is the source of all forms, is the cause of bliss to the eyes as well as the mind.444 The form of God, being comprehensible to all aspirants, can be worshipped for their respective supplication.445 Moreover, the Bhāgavatam proclaims that it would not have been possible to attain to the realization (Vijñāna) overcoming ignorance but for God's form of Sattva, because the reasoning can give only an indirect inferential understanding of God.446 Being engrossed in the matter man cannot transcend the matter immediately. For the realization of the subtle form of God, one
must, at least initially, contemplate on the gross form of God. \(^{447}\) Because though God is without any differentiation (\textit{vikalpa-rahiita}) for those who realize that all is \textit{Atman}, still by His \textit{Māyā} He assumes various powers, forms, weapons and adornments. \(^{448}\) Whoever hears, recites and studies the gross form of God attains to the purity of intellect through faith and devotion that accrue to the contemplation on the gross form of God. \(^{449}\) One can meditate on the gross form of God (\textit{virāṭ}) until one develops devotion, \(^{450}\) after which the Supreme Guru, God Himself, guides one in the spiritual path according to one's requirement for the progress and realization.

\textbf{v. The content of God's form:}

According to the \textit{Bhagavatam}, the purest (\textit{suddha or viśuddha}) \textit{sattva} is the content of God's form; the purest \textit{sattva} refers to the exceptional excellences like virtue, knowledge, dispassion, lordliness, powers etc. that are attributed to God. \(^{451}\) God protects all beings through His \textit{sattva} or goodness. \(^{452}\) These very excellences are attributed to God's form as well — whether it is a form, which God takes in His various incarnations or the myriad forms — also known as the \textit{arca-vatāras} — that are worshipped by the devotee. \textit{Sattva} has the enlightening capacity (\textit{sattvam laghu prakāśakam}); \(^{453}\) that is to say, the act of seeing and contemplating on the form of God is capable of producing \textit{sattva} in the worshipper, hence it is among the surest way to enkindle the knowledge and devotion in the devotee. The worship of God’s form is free from the effects of \textit{rajas} and \textit{tamas}, which bind a person to the cycle of karmas. Vallabha also agrees that the pure \textit{sattva} as the element of God’s form refers to the constituent power — \textit{guna} — of goodness in God. \(^{454}\)

\textbf{Critique of pure sattva:} There appears to be a contradiction in the regard to God's form being the purest \textit{sattva}, since the form as worshipped in the images etc., God’s incarnations in human or other species and the cosmic form of God are all made up

\(^{447}\) V,26,39  
\(^{448}\) VI,8,32  
\(^{449}\) I,3,29  
\(^{450}\) II,2,14  
\(^{451}\) V,20,40; V,25,10  
\(^{452}\) I,2,34  
\(^{453}\) \textit{Sāṅkhya-karika of Śvarakṛṣṇa}, 13  
\(^{454}\) \textit{AITM}, FN, 66
of elements, which are the products of *tamas ahaṅkāra*. The contradiction is to be resolved by considering the subjective application of *sattva*; in other words, the godliness in various forms of God is to be visualized by the devotee with the help of *sattva*. As observed, *Sattva* is the quality that produces knowledge in the spiritual aspirant. Therefore, the devotee must cultivate *sattva* in order to see the form of God whether in the images etc., in forms of the incarnations of God, in the holy persons, in the Nature, or in everything. Evidently, the same form may appear as elemental to the one not established in the purity. *Sattva* is the quality, which enables one to see God (*Brahmadarsana*). Ultimately, the experience of godliness is subjective; hence, verily the subject requires cultivating the qualities, which eventually makes the perception of the godliness possible. The *Bhāgavatam* rightly calls the purest mind (*citta*) as Vāsudeva conveying the meaning, thereby, that the ‘vision’ of God takes place in the purest mind, which eventually attain the Godly consciousness, the principle which corroborates with the Vedic dictum that the knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*.

5. GRADATIONS IN THE REALITY:

Prof. S. Bhattacarya postulates four grades of Reality in the *Bhāgavatam*: *Brahma*, *Paramātmā*, *Bhagavān* and the Non-dual Consciousness. He bases his line of thought on the *Upāniṣads* and substantiates his view with certain passages from the *Bhāgavatam*. The *Bhāgavatam*, however, so freely uses any of those epithets at every point it describes the nature of the Supreme Reality, that it becomes difficult to concur with the idea of gradations in the Supreme Reality while calling It by any of these names, as Prof. S. Bhattacarya surmises in his book, apparently on the line of Caitanya (*Acintyabhedābheda*) School. Prof. S. Bhattacarya’s idea is relevant in terms of succession in manifestation of the Supreme Reality in the creation. Nevertheless, it may not hold ground as far as the philosophical foundation of the *Bhāgavatam* is concerned for, the impersonal and personal are the only aspects of the same Reality; neither of the two should be construed as exclusively the ultimate nature of the Real-

\[\text{CH - 1: THE CONCEPT OF THE SUPREME REALITY}\]

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455 1,2,24
456 III,26,21
457 'sa yo ha vai tat paramam brahmaved brahmaiva bhava', Mundaka Up., III,2,9
458 Bhattacarya, pp.20-24 & chs. I-V
ity. While describing God, the *Bhāgavatam* begins with 'Paranja Satya' (the highest Truth) or 'Para Brahma' in line with the Śruti and gradually, goes on to describe the personal aspects of God calling Him as Bhagavān, Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva, and by numerous other names without indicating that those aspects be considered as the gradations in God. Gradation implies dilution of the divinity. Both – the impersonal and personal – aspects are eternally inherent in God, and equally describe the very nature of God. The *Bhāgavatam* is so much non-dualistic in its approach to the Reality that it delights even in putting the manifestation of godliness in the human forms, or in certain cases in the non-human forms as well, on a par with the Supreme Reality as is evident in its doctrine of the Incarnation (*Avatāra*). The *Bhāgavatam*’s mission of pinpointing the monism and monotheism that can be universally practiced requires that the *Bhāgavatam* cannot compartmentalize the Supreme Reality.

God is necessarily one. The *Bhāgavatam*, even while worshipping different aspects of God such as sattva in Viṣṇu, rajas in Brahma, and tamas in Śiva, is of the firm opinion that God is one not only in His creative manifestations but also in His benedictory manifestations such as incarnations. The unity in the Supreme Reality that the *Bhāgavatam* conceives of is universally applicable. It is further extended to the unity of all phenomenal existence in God, which leaves no scope for the gradations.

6. **God as the Creator, the Ultimate Cause: The Cosmological Manifestations of God:**

The *Bhāgavatam* owes its cosmological ideas to *Sāṃkhya*. However, it is theistic like Yoga of Patanjali although the theism is of the *Bhāgavatam* is much different from that of Yoga as the *Bhāgavatam*, unlike Yoga, considers the role of God in every aspect of the creation as characteristic to the creation. As regards the cosmogonical ideas, the *Bhāgavatam* borrows almost ditto from the *Puruṣa sukta*, *Nāsadiya sukta* and *Hiranyagarbha sukta*.

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459 IV,16,51
460 infra, p. 45 etc.
461 *Re-veda*, X,90
462 ibid., X,129
463 ibid., X,121
God, the Supreme Truth is the ultimate cause of all-that-there-is. He creates Himself (as the world) out of Himself and this creation subsists in Him. He creates, sustains and destroys the creation without being least attached or affected by it. He endowed the form and name to the formless and nameless spirit, directed His mâyä, which has desire to procreate and delude the individual qualified spirit. Thus, the Bhågavatam considers God as the ultimate efficient as well as material cause of the creation; He is the final cause (gåti) as well. To bring out the creation is but a play for the one who is self-born (ätmanyon) and actionless Transcendental being; merely 'will' (saṅkalpa matra) suffices to create. Moreover, the creation is not an accidental amalgamation of the subtle and gross elements. God as the creator works out the program of creation most intelligently and most teleologically.

i. Purpose of Creation:
The Bhågavatam considers, in line with the Śruti and Brahmasûtras, that from the viewpoint of God there is no other purpose but ‘God’s will’ (ätmecchā), ‘God’s Sport’, or ‘God’s glance’ (ikså) behind the creation of the souls along with the elements. Here, the Bhågavatam accepts the Śruti text referring to the desire of Brahman to be many, and its īkṣåna. In the spirit of the Bhågavatam, Sridhara very rightly interprets ātmecchā of Brahman as mâyä. The Bhågavatam once again draws on the idea of the Supreme Reality referred as the lord of mâyä (Mâyin) from the Śvetåśvatara Up.

However, from the viewpoint of souls, God evolved these great and small bodies out of five elements for the sake of enjoyment of objects and liberation of the embod-
ied souls; and that He created the faculties like intellect, mind, senses and vital force in souls, so that they can enjoy, attain to heaven and then to liberation.

On the basis of the argument that even sport is induced through desire Gaudapada asks that how can God who is self-fulfilled can have a desire? He, then, presents the answer to this question that since there can be no desire in God; the creation is the very nature of God.

II. The Concept of \textit{Mâyā}:

When we try to observe the cosmological manifestations of God, we are required to analyze the reality of \textit{mâyā} because, the \textit{Bhagavatam} considers \textit{mâyā} as God’s own, inseparable potency, totally dependent on Him with its constituent three\textit{ guṇas}, which are capable of subsisting in dual condition of cause and effect, with which He brings forth the world and His many other creations. \textit{Mâyā}, as the secondary cause of creation, is the potency of God, and lies in God in the latent state before the creation takes place. \textit{Mâyā} is defined as that which makes possible for something inexplicable to appear in the Reality of \textit{Ātman} without any corresponding reality just like an appearance of a second (illusory) moon, and which also obscures the Reality of \textit{Ātman} like the eclipse of the moon is eclipsed. Thus, the \textit{vedāntic āvarana} and \textit{vikṣepa} are considered as the characteristics of \textit{mâyā}.

The \textit{Vedāntasūtras} compares \textit{mâyā} with dreams or illusion. The \textit{Bhagavatam} considers \textit{mâyā} as the real potency of God, and at times deifies \textit{mâyā}, granting her the place ‘beside’ (as the consort of God) God without sacrificing the supremacy of God as the One and the only one Absolute.
The Concept of the Supreme Reality

Maya in the Bhāgavatam is known by various names: Maya, Ātmamaya, Śakti, Prakṛti, Vidyā, Avidyā, Ajā, Viṣṇumaya, Yogamaya, Pṛdhāna, Devī, etc. The Kevalādvaita attributes māyā to Īśvara – the relative personal God. The Bhāgavatam does not find any contradiction between the Personal and the impersonal God as there is only one Reality behind this apparent categorization. The Bhāgavatam, therefore, attributes māyā to the Supreme Reality (Paramam, Param Puruṣa, Paramātman). This demonstrates as much uniqueness in the concept of the Supreme Reality as in the concept of māyā. Maya is the manifestation of the will (Sankalpa) of the Supreme Reality. She is the unknowable aspect of God, with the dual nature (sad and asad) of cause and effect, manifest and latent, real and unreal. In order to convey the mysterious nature and unfathomable character of māyā, the Bhāgavatam figuratively says that even God does not know the extent of His māyā.

Scholars have a little difference of opinion regarding the definition of māyā or Ātmamaya. Sankara understands it as “drṣṭa-naṣṭa-svarūpatva”, Bhaskara as “arthapratyaya-Śunyaṭva”, Ramanuja as “āścaryātmakatva” and Vallabha as sarvabhāvavāna-sāmarthya (God’s power of creating everything). Vira Raghava considers Ātmamaya as God’s power called ‘miracle’ (āścarya ṣakti), Vijayadhvaja as God’s will ‘to be’ (svarūpabhūta icchā), Jiva Goswami as well as Vamsidhara as God’s will, Vis-

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485 I,3,30; etc.
486 II,9,24; IV,12,6; etc.
487 III,5,25; IV,7,59; etc.
488 III,26,10; etc.
489 V,12,10
490 X,1,25; III,10,12; etc.
491 III,5,22; X,2,6; etc.
492 III,26,10; etc.
493 I,3,34; III,6,2; III,26,4
494 X,86,44-45 & 48; X,87,14
495 I,9,26-27
496 II,7,41
497 III,5,25;
498 III,6,39
499 AITM, FN, I,9,10

36
vanatha Cakravarty considering it the same as Yogamāyā—‘the mystic power’, Giridhara Goswami as God’s free will, while Sridhara understands it as ‘illusion’ and ‘fickleness’ (vīkṣepa). However, even while equating ‘ignorance’ (ābhāṣa) with māyā, the Bhāgavatam knows māyā to be God’s knowledge (Vijñāna), or in the words of Sridhara ‘intellectual power’, and uses any of the names of māyā at different occasions as freely as it uses any of the epithets of God at different times.

In nutshell, the Bhāgavatam considers the following as the nature of māyā: Māyā is

1. the inseparable potency of God.
2. the name of the creative power of God.
3. made up of three primal qualities—sattva, rajas and tamas.
4. of the dual nature of cause and effect.
5. unknowable precisely.
6. as an objective creative principle, the matter.
7. subjectively, ignorance.
8. as a subjective epistemological principle, of the nature of not only illusion but also knowledge (Vijñāna ākṣaṭa).
9. the multi-formed (bahurūpa) and creates innumerable subjective and objective forms.
10. the name of Time (kāla-saurijā).

iii. Three Potencies of God:

God has infinite potencies (anantākṣaṭa). The Bhāgavatam identifies three of those—Cosmological, Epistemological and Theological—as explaining the whole gamut of macrocosmic as well as the microcosmic evolution. They are known as Karmākṣaṭa, Ātmaśaṭa and Devasaṭa representing the powers of creating the world (non-self),

500 AITM, FN, 1,1,18 and III,25,1
501 AITM, FN, III,5,37
502 IV,9,33
503 I,2,31
504 IV,9,2
505 IV,24,43
consciousness (self), and sustenance, respectively.\textsuperscript{506} Viśṇu P calls these potencies as \textit{Avidyā-karmasanātiṇī, Kṣetrajñākhya} and \textit{Parā} or \textit{Svarūpa śaktis}. These three potencies verily spring from within God, and they are never to be considered independent of Him. He, as the controller of \textit{māyā},\textsuperscript{507} is the controller of these three potencies. The powers are inexplicably manifest as His will. As they manifest in the form of God’s will, God becomes the possessor of these powers; hence, He is called ‘Māyādhipati’\textsuperscript{508} or ‘Māyēsa.’\textsuperscript{509} Prior to their manifestation, they were one with God and there was no apparent distinction between the possessed and the Possessor.\textsuperscript{510}

The respective functions of the potencies are: First, (as \textit{Karmaśakti}) bringing forth the phenomenal existence out of the Noumenon; second, (as \textit{Ātmaśakti}) giving impetus to the primary creation by involving \textit{Puruṣa} in it;\textsuperscript{511} third, (as \textit{Devasakti} or \textit{Yogamāyā}) re-establishing the identity of the soul, that is bound by the phenomena, with the Noumenon.\textsuperscript{512}

The three are merely different names of the three functions of \textit{māyā}, often known as \textit{Viṣṇumāyā} being the power of \textit{Mahāviṣṇu}, \textit{Ātmanāyā} being ‘God’s own power’, and \textit{Yogamāyā} being ‘God’s will to sustain the material creation and the spiritual life of the souls’. \textit{Māyā}, who is God’s will manifest, includes in it the instruments of creation: Action (\textit{Karma}), Time (\textit{Kāla}) and Innate disposition (\textit{Svabhāva}),\textsuperscript{513} as also Matter (\textit{Dravya}), and the souls (\textit{Jīva}).\textsuperscript{514} With these as instruments, \textit{māyā} herself works for God in the primary creation; it functions through the Triune Deity of \textit{Brahmā, Viṣṇu} and \textit{Śiva} in the secondary creation. When God’s will as \textit{māyā} starts functioning, the three efficiencies of \textit{Kāla, Karma} and \textit{Svabhāva} (along with Matter and the souls)
come into existence from out of māyā and when God's will subsists in Himself, the three efficiencies (along with Matter and the souls) dissolve in Him along with māyā.515

iv. Karmaśakti or Prakṛti.
Karmaśakti is God's potency, which stands for Prakṛti with three gunas as the constituents. Prakṛti is defined as the first (Pradhāna) principle, consisting of three gunas; it is latent and eternal, of the nature of cause and effect, it is by itself undifferentiated but provides the basis for all distinctions.Śvetāsvatara Up. refers to māyā as Prakṛti.516

The functions of māyā as Prakṛti are absolutely bound by the law of creation as well as by Time.518 Except giving initial impetus, even Puruṣa has no indulgence in the process of Prakṛta creation. Law of Prakṛti is to evolve, Prakṛti is 'unemotional', as if. This aspect of Karmaśakti as envisaged in the Bhāgavatam is the exact replica of the Sāṅkhya theory of evolution. The very unemotional, or say neutral nature of Prakṛti compelled the Sāṅkhya teachers to call her acetana (inert) and aviveki (undifferentiative).519 According to the Bhāgavatam, Prakṛti is not inert. She is Śakti, the potency of Brahman. Kapila and Kṛṣṇa, in their exposition on Sāṅkhya as found in the Bhāgavatam nowhere state that Prakṛti is inert. One of the defining characteristics of Prakṛti, according to the Bhāgavatam, is 'avišeṣam višeṣavat'.520 This means that Prakṛti is latent but can manifest. This may be considered as the potentiality of inheriting consciousness in Prakṛti. There is nothing that is devoid of consciousness because everything is permeated by both Prakṛti and Puruṣa.521

v. The Primary Evolution:522
The theory of evolution of the Bhāgavatam is almost a replica of the Sāṅkhya theory of evolution. The departure of the former from the later is in consideration of Prakṛti.

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515 XI,24,26-27
516 III,26,10*, also cf. Sāṅkhya Karika of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, 10-11 etc.
517 Śvetāsvatara Up., IV, 10 'Māyām tu prakṛtān viddhi'
518 III,5,25-27
519 Sāṅkhya-karika of Īśvarakṛṣṇa,
520 III,26,10*
521 XI,24,16
522 II,5,23-31; II,5,27-36; III,26,23-49; XI,24,5-8
as a potency of God as against the inert principle responsible for the evolution. Moreover, the *Bhāgavatam* balances *Parināmavāda* of *Sāṅkhya* with *Viśvarāvāda* of the *Upaṇiṣads* and *Kevalādvaita* on the basis of its unique monism which, unlike the *Kevalādvaita* considers God as both with and without attributes; that is, as the possessor of *Prakṛti*, He is non-different from it. According to the *Bhāgavatam*, from *Prakṛti* comes forth the whole primary creation beginning with the subtlest of the categories, *viz.*, the *Mahattattva*, to the grossest of them, *viz.*, earth. Out of the latent and inchoate *māyā*, manifests the *Mahattattva*, the Cosmic Intellect. It is the purest *sattva* of golden hue also known as *Hiranyagarbha* with the whole creation in the seminal condition,*superscript 111* or subjectively, as *Citta* belonging to the state of *Vāsudeva,*superscript 24 and having the greatest capacity to reflect God in it. Among categories, it is the closest to God in order of succession as well as with reference to the proximity. Having *mahattattva* manifested out of *Prakṛti*, God revealed the universe, which existed in him. *Mahattattva* gave birth to *ahaṅkāra*, the Cosmic Ego, with three qualities (*guṇas*) latent in it. Out of *sāttvika ahaṅkāra* or the *Vaikārika*, which has God’s power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*) came *manas* - the mind, and the presiding deities of senses (*indriyas*) of knowledge and action. The presiding deities of the cognitive senses (*jñānendriya*) are *Dīk, Vāyu, Sūrya, Varuṇa* and *Aśvins*; those of volition (*karmendriya*) are *Agni, Indra, Upeṇdra, Mitra* and *Prajāpati*. The senses arose from *rajasika ahaṅkāra* or the *Taijasa*, which has God’s power of action (*Kriyāśakti*). The senses of knowledge (*jñānendriya*) are the functions of ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose. The senses of action (*karmendriya*) are the functions of speech, apprehension, motion, excretion and generation. The individual intellect (*buddhi*) and vital breath (*prāṇa*) also arose from the *rajasika ahaṅkāra*. Out of the *tāmasika ahaṅkāra*, which has God’s power of substantiality (*Dravyaśakti*), came the subtle elements (*tanmātrās*) and the gross elements (*mahābhūtas*). *Tanmātrās* are the subtle elements of sound, touch, light, taste and smell. *Mahābhūtas* are the gross elements of sky, air, fire, water and earth. This is called the Primary Evolution (*Sarga*).
vi. Purpose of the Description of Cosmology:

We figure out the three-fold purpose of the narration of God’s cosmological activities. First, the description of God and His various cosmological manifestations such as the Root-matter (Prakṛṭi), Time (kāla), Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic egg (Brahmāṇḍa), Mahāviśvau with Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, Viśrūḍh, Śisumāra, Kṣetrajña, Vyūhas, and finally Ātman, verily indicate the creative functioning of One and the only one Ultimate Reality variously called as Brahman, Vāsudeva, Puruṣottama, etc.

Secondly, the description indicates that at every stage of creation God’s active presence is required. The creation is not governed mechanically by the laws only; it has an intelligent governor behind it. The categories together with the deities formed an inert Cosmic Shell, which is known as Viśeṣa (or Brahmāṇḍa) when God enters it. Then God breaks open that lifeless (acetana) shell so as to manifest as Puruṣavatāra or Nārāyaṇa who is subject to Yoganīdrā but awakes in the cosmic form of Viśrūḍh with all possibilities of the creation in the manifest form as constituting His body. Out of the Viśrūḍh comes the Lotus, the abode of the souls, in which He manifests as the secondary efficient agency known as Brahmā. At this stage of cosmic manifestation also, the immanence of God is conceived in the form of Kṣetrajña who enters into the heart of the Viśrūḍh enabling the categories to conglomerate so as to further the creation. As Ātmanāyā, He abides within everything as Puruṣa (the indwelling Spirit) and pervades outside everything as Time. Moreover, God’s presence is also conceived in the form of four Vyūhas as the lord of microcosmic principles and the subjective states of the soul’s consciousness. The cosmological description em-
phatically states that the creation does not proceed mechanically but it is totally
guided and permeated by God at every stage. God enters various material bodies
created by Him and enjoys the creation through those bodies (in the form of the
souls). The Bhāgavatam admits that the creation has Prakṛti as the substance but it
does not accept that once put into motion the creation evolves of itself.

The third implication of the description is related to the sādhaka and his sādhanā. Just
as at every stage of creation the presence of God is required, similarly at every stage
of sādhanā God’s presence as the Master of the sādhanā is required. Sādhanā, how­
ever perfect, does not attain completeness without God’s presence in it just like a
body without head is incomplete. The fact that success accrues only due to God is
beautifully expressed in Arjuna’s distress at his failure to totally protect the wives of the
Yādavas; he says, “The same bow, the same arrows, the same chariot, and I, the
same occupant of the chariot... But alas! Lacking the presence of the Lord behind
these, all of them have been reduced to utter futility...” Sādhanā of any kind has
meaning only in being offered to God. For, all virtues are sheltered in God. Every­
thing exists in and through God, and nothing is end-in-itself; everything – austeri­
ity, knowledge, Yoga, svadharma, karma – has the Supreme End in Vāsudeva.
The fulfilment of birth, knowledge, austerity and intuition lies in the attainment of God
alone.

Thus, the Bhāgavatam considers God as the supreme regulator of all laws, and envis­
ages His role at all levels evolution – whether macrocosmic or microcosmic.

7. DEVĀŚAKTI OR YOGAMĀYĀ AS THE FORCE BEHIND THE DOCTRINE OF
INCARNATION (AVATĀRA):

Māyā is the aspect with which God manifests Himself. It is non-different from God:
it is only another name of God’s glorious being (nāmarūpe Bhagavātī pratyayast-
vanapāśrayah). God’s manifestation as the creative categories is known as Karmaśakti or Prakrti. His manifestation as the immanent controller of the universe is known as Ātmaśakti; and His immense benevolence out of which He sustains the creation and in the role of incarnations, becomes accessible to His subjects is known as Devaśakti or Yogamāyā. ‘Yoga’ means uniting or joining. Yogamāyā is God’s potency, which unites the soul with God. The soul (purusa) enveloped by the matter (Prakṛti) identifies self with the matter under the impact of Ātmaśakti of God, losing thereby, the knowledge of his pristine nature; he is said to be bound in the material existence subject to the laws of matter, viz., creation, decay, and destruction or, subjectively said, to the cycle of misery and happiness. The supreme joy lies in the knowledge of Self who is none but God. As seen, the Bhāgavatam requires God’s presence at every stage of the macrocosmic as well as microcosmic evolution. The soul who is bound by God’s potencies verily requires God’s help to relieve of the bondage as well. This redemptive role of God is known as Yogamāyā. Yogamāyā withdraws and the soul becomes one with Brahman being established in the glory of the Self.

Yogamāyā is the ‘power of God in the creation of the world personified as a deity’; being the spirit of God that functions behind the liberation of the soul and worshipped as Devī, she is considered as the consort of God (Deva). That is how she is called as the mistress of the boon-seeking devotees. By this, one is not to understand Yogamāyā as different from God. When the Bhāgavatam deifies Māyā whether in the form of Kātyā-yanī, Bhavāni, Ambikā, Devī, Mahāmāyā Lakṣmī, Bhadrakāli, Bhag-avati, Durgā, or others, it sings the glory of Nārāyan, the

543 VI,19,13
544 I,3,34
545 Apte
546 X,2,10
547 X,4,13
548 X,22,4
549 X,53,45
550 X,53,46; X,2,12
551 I,3,34; X,2,7
552 VI,19,11-12; IV,20,28; etc.
553 V,9,16-18
554 X,1,25
One Supreme Reality. The *Bhāgavatam* does not accept the dual Supreme principles. *Yogamāyā* is also known as God’s power of grace (*anugrahaśakti*). The references to the Śakti-worship in the *Bhāgavatam* are to be understood as the worship of God in one of His innumerable forms, called as Śakti. The other two potencies are not deified although they are no different from *Yogamāyā* as far as the identity of the three with God is concerned, possibly because while *Karmaśakti* is considered as the material principle, *Ātmāśakti* is instrumental in binding the free soul to the matter.

When God is said to take birth in the human or some other specie for a purpose, He is said as having done so with the help of *Yogamāyā*. God as the Incarnate enacts all sports with the assistance of *Yogamāyā*. Thus, *Yogamāyā* is the redemptive potency of God. *Yogamāyā* is said to be at the disposal of God.

**8. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION:**

Jaiswal traces the origin of the theory of incarnation to the identification of *bhagavat Nārāyaṇa* with the hero-god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The scholars trace the germs of this theory to a Rg-vedic passage which refers to Viṣṇu’s having assumed another form in battle as also to the *Nirukta* which speaks of the deities with anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic forms. However, Jaiswal rightly observes that the Vaisnavite theory of incarnation may have its origin in the *Bhagavad Gītā* which, again, is inspired, particularly in this regard, by the Buddhist concept of the former Buddhas. The said impact on the *Bhāgavatam* concept of incarnation makes it evident that when the *Bhāgavatam* alludes to the doctrine of incarnation, it generally

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555 X,56,35-36
556 X,2,12
557 IX,24,58
558 I,2,6; etc.
559 X,29,1
560 X,2,6
561 Jaiswal, p. 129
562 (i) R.P. Chandra, *The Indo-Aryan Races*, pp. 110-1
563 Rg-veda, VII, 100-6
564 Nirukta, VII, 6-7
565 ibid, IV, 5-8
566 Jaiswal, pp. 129-130

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means *lilavatāras* – God’s manifestations among the humans. Jaiswal has given a splendid historical account of the origin of various *lilavatāras.*

The term ‘*avatāra*’ is derived from the root ‘*avatr*’ ‘to descend’, ‘to come down’ and is of an introduction of the late *puranic* literature including the *Bhāgavatam*, the *Bhagavat Gītā* and the *Nārāyanīya* of the *Mbh*, the *Harivamśa*, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* (with an exception of an interpolated verse) as well as the Buddhist traditions – all of which use from among the terms *janman* (birth), *sambhāva* (springing up, coming into being), *srjān* (creation), *prādurbhāva* (appearance) and *jātaka* (incarnation). The theory of incarnation successfully established the superiority of *Nārāyana-Viṣṇu* or *Hari* who is the re-invention of the resplendent sustainer Sun god over the other two Vedic gods, *viz.*, Fire – later on recognised as the creator god *Vṛiṇīci* of red hue and the Wind or the Storm god – later on recognised as the destroyer god *Hara* of black hue (of smoke). The *Bhāgavatam* establishes, in the very first canto, this superiority of *Bhagavān Adhokṣaja* who is pure being.

Moreover, the theory also aims to assimilate some significant non-Aryan totemic as well as anthropomorphic deities into the Brahmanical fold as also the deification of the powerful heroes, kings, nobles and sages. This is well explained by the fact that the original lists of God’s manifestations as found in the *Nārāyanīya* of the *Mbh* enumerate six and four *incarnations*, the *Mārkandeya* enumerates four and another list, ten, which is found to be a late interpolation, are expanded by the *Bhāgavatam* and the *Pañcarātra Sanhitā* to enumerate as many as twenty-seven and twenty-nine incarnations, respectively. The theory also successfully mitigated the challenge which the atheist Buddhism and Jainism posed before the Vedic religion...
by accepting the founders of the two religions, viz., Buddha and Ṛṣabhadēva, as incarnations of Viṣṇu.

Anyway, the ultimate result served extremely well the most constructive purpose of the Vaisnavism, viz., to convert the Vedic religion, which used to be practised in its purity only by a few Brāhmaṇas, into the more palpable religion in order to uplift the religious consciousness of all and sundry to the level hitherto unknown in the history by introducing it to the masses. It 'gave the country a kind of cultural unity and succeeded in establishing the same kind of social structure all over India.'

9. THE CLASSIFICATION OF INCARNATIONS:

In concurrence with the Pañcarātra literature, the Bhāgavatam classifies God's manifestations as incarnations as following:

1. Guṇāvatāras:578

God in His creative role assumes three qualities – rajas in order to create, sattva in order to maintain, and tamas in order to bring about the destruction. The said three roles are called His guṇāvatāras579 and in those roles, He is known as Brahmā or Viśnu or Hari and Śiva or Hara, respectively, as the creator, sustainer and destroyer. As already noted, the three manifestations are the puranic re-invention of the Vedic gods Fire, Sun and Wind or Storm. According to the puranic tradition, which is upheld by the Bhāgavatam, Mount Meru, Vaikuṇṭha and Mount Kailasa are the abodes of the three, respectively. The Bhāgavatam, even while upholding the puranic tradition in general, departs from it at times carving out its uniqueness in terms of the universality that it aims to preach. Thus, it clearly mentions that the three are not to be considered as different from each other580 and that the three names of the same reality refer to functional differences only. Seeing the oneness among them, leads to Peace.581 However, sattva being conducive to the attainment of knowledge, a devotee should worship God in His sattvic manifestation of Viṣṇu or Hari.582

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577 ibid., p. 147
578 I, 2, 23; X, 3, 20; XII, 10, 22
579 I, 7, 28
580 IV, 7, 54; XII, 10, 22
581 IV, 7, 54
582 I, 2, 23-24
It is surprising how Śiva, the eminent god of the non-Aryan Indian people, was not assimilated as an incarnation of Viṣṇu by the Vaiṣṇava movement just as it did Buddha and Rṣabhadeva. The eminence of Śiva was so much pronounced and that his worship had so much percolated in the upper Brāhmaṇa class that the Vaiṣṇava movement had to maintain his place 'beside' Viṣṇu. However, the Bhāgavatam tries to obliterate the difference between the two and establish the monotheist religion.

ii. Vyuhāvatāras.\[^583\]

The idea of vyūhas owes its origin to the Pañcarātra system with Kṛṣṇa legend replacing the dominance of Viṣṇu. The four vyūhas are Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, his brother Balarāma equated with Saṅkarṣaṇa\[^584\], his son Pradyumna, and his grandson – the son of Pradyumna – Aniruddha. The Bhāgavatam differently considers the four, in three different places, as the presiding manifestations of the macrocosmic and the microcosmic existence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vyuha</th>
<th>Canto</th>
<th>IV,24,34-36</th>
<th>III,26,21-28</th>
<th>XII,11,21-23</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vāsudeva</td>
<td>Transcendental</td>
<td>Intelligence (citta or mahat)</td>
<td>Self-realisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saṅkarṣaṇa</td>
<td>Destroyer</td>
<td>Ego (ahaṅkāra)</td>
<td>Deep sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pradyumna</td>
<td>Cosmic Knowledge</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>Dream state</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aniruddha</td>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Mind (manas)</td>
<td>Waking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sridhara has proposed a little different scheme.\[^585\] The Bhāgavatam, however, does not emphasize the doctrine of vyūhas. Prof. Sheridan observes, "They play only a peripheral role in the Bhāgavatās teaching, being used chiefly as titles and epithets...In so far as it is used at all, it is inconsistent. The fact that it has been included in the

\[^583\] III,26,21-28; IV,24,34-36; XII,11,21-23
\[^584\] X,8,22; X,2,13
\[^585\] Bhattacarya, p.99
Bhāgavata is probably due to the eclectic tendency of the Purāṇa. Prof. S. Bhattacarya has discussed the doctrine elaborately.

iii. Manvantarāvatāras

According to the puranic tradition, manvantara is a specific time-period over which God appoints a King called Manu; there are fourteen of such periods in a Kalpa, two of which make a day of Brahmā or the Hiranyagarbha. Each manvantara is officiated by the sages, gods and an incarnation; these incarnations are known as the manvantarāvatāras; some of them are also included in the list of the twenty-four incarnations. They are Yajña, Kapila (also considered as a kalpa-vatāra as his life spans up to the end of a Kalpa), Viśhu, Satyasena, Hari, Vāmana, Sarvabhauma, Rṣabha, Visvākṣena, Dharmasetu, Svadhāma, Yogesvara, and Brhdbandhu. Their function is more of a cosmic superintendence, hence, their interaction with the human kind is not considered; therefore, their lives or acts are not elaborated in the Bhāgavatam.

iv. Lilāvatāras

Although the Bhāgavatam enumerates several incarnations of God, what is usually understood by the term avatāra or incarnation is described in the Bhāgavatam as the play manifestations (lilāvatāra) of Bhagavān in the world of humans. God is said to take birth among the humans in order to protect and guide the mankind. This is the magnificent role of the Transcendental Being as the embodied one. This descent is what is called the Avatāra, the Lilāvatāra or the Incarnation. God incarnates just out of sport; hence, he is known as lilāvatāra. The incarnation is the Transcendental en-cased in the phenomenal, but really incorporeal, and is distinguished from other corporeal forms through the unparallel and extraordinary glories, which are incompatible with the corporeal forms. The inscrutable nature of the theory of incarnation is very mystically described in the Bhāgavatam: who can know the activities of the Supreme
Soul as to where, how, when and in what number they come in to play?\textsuperscript{592*} Avatāra-hood is God’s function of Protection (Rakṣā) through which He protects His creation by destroying the evil.\textsuperscript{593}

It is important to note that although God manifests as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva for the purpose of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe by the aspects of Rājas, Sattva and Tamas, respectively,\textsuperscript{594} it is Viṣṇu who sustains and augments the universe, and, therefore, all incarnations among gods, men or sub-human species are said to be of Pure Sattva only\textsuperscript{595} being the manifestations of Viṣṇu.

The rational mind would obviously pose a question, ‘Is God not potent enough to protect His creation without directly interfering in the form of incarnation? If God is omnipotent, He can protect the mankind even without manifesting in the world; then, what is the purpose of the incarnation?’ The rational mind of Dr. Radhakrishnan, unable to acknowledge the descent of the Transcendental to the level of the phenomenal, evaluates the concept of incarnation as “the exaltation of human nature to the level of Godhead” and that “when any finite individual develops spiritual qualities and shows large insight and charity, he sits in judgement and starts a spiritual and social upheaval and we say that God is born.”\textsuperscript{596} According to him, “the human being is as good as an Avatāra, provided he crosses the māyā of the world and transcends his imperfection.”\textsuperscript{597} R.D. Ranade would disagrees with such a contention; according to him, “The expression Avatāra connotes descent more than ascent, the prefix ‘Ava’ meaning ‘down.’ Avatāra, therefore, literally ought to mean descent of spirit into matter instead of ascent of matter into spirit.”\textsuperscript{598} Aurobindo also shares similar view.\textsuperscript{599}
10. NATURE OF INCARNATION:

i. He remains detached and always aware of His Being:

When God incarnates, He is said as having accompanied by His 'Yogamāyā for the protection and resurrection of the spiritual message, without being bound by the projections of matter on Him.\textsuperscript{600} Although God incarnates among the humans, His divinity stands His action out. For, He is always aware of His being and the purpose behind His incarnation. He performs all His acts with the least loss of His prowess and excellence.\textsuperscript{601} Yogamāyā projects the gunas and their effects on God but all those do not affect God.\textsuperscript{602} Just as light and heat of the sun remain ever the same, similarly, no action enhances or dims His glory.\textsuperscript{603} For the one who creates, sustains and dissolves in the sport only, the marvellous acts as an Avatāra are the least surprising.\textsuperscript{604} Just as the Supreme manifests as the cosmos, enters it (as Ksetrajña, Antaryāmin, or Sutrātman) so as to carry on His sport and dissolves it – all these with His glory and prowess ever remaining unchanged and unaffected, so does the incarnation appears and disappears with the help of His māyā as an actor or a magician in course of his show but remaining ever the same Supreme Person.\textsuperscript{605} The redemptive activities of God, performed on the stage of the ephemeral world (samsāra) with the effects of qualities, sometimes, create an appearance of bondage for God; but this is just an appearance. The transcendental being of God remains ever pure and ever established in His inherent bliss during all His activities.\textsuperscript{606} Though abiding in Prakṛti, He has no bondage or ignorance; this is the uniqueness of God.\textsuperscript{607}

However, when, with the instrument of Yogamāyā, He projects three qualities on Himself, He also acts as having come under the sway of Yogamāyā and suffers the effects of qualities. He sometimes behaves like a human appearing as subject to an-

\textsuperscript{600} X,83,4; III,1,44; VIII,24,5-6
\textsuperscript{601} X,8,36
\textsuperscript{602} X,85,13-14
\textsuperscript{603} X,74,4
\textsuperscript{604} X,50,30; X,90,47
\textsuperscript{605} XII,10,30; X,31,11
\textsuperscript{606} VIII,24,4; X,27,4; X,59,43; X,81,13
\textsuperscript{607} I,11,38
Nevertheless, this so-called suffering of Grief, infatuation or bondage of sport and does have a purpose for the souls. Sometimes by so doing, He Himself, by veil of His maya. Examples of such suffering may be observed in the narratives of several incarnations. However, by such occurrences the nature of the Immaculate is not disturbed in the least. Grief, infatuation, attachment and fear find place only in the ignorant, not in the God Incarnate who is the embodiment of perfect knowledge, wisdom and glory. He remains God in every circumstance. Only the ignorrant consider Him as one among them forgetting His Godhood. His spiritual knowledge is never affected by Time, any afflictions, actions, qualities, any external cause; but the ordinary people regard Him one like themselves as He shrouds Himself under His own potencies, vital airs, etc. just as the sun is concealed by clouds, mists and eclipse etc.

ii. Incarnation is the paragon of virtues:

When God incarnates in the form of a being, he is accompanied by all the majesties and virtues. Therefore, wherever He takes birth and acts, that place becomes all auspicious. He is the treasure of virtues, nay, all virtues really originate in Him. When He takes the form of a being, He exemplifies all the virtues suited to that particular form, and carves the path for the ages to come. When He takes human form, all possible human virtues are exhibited in Him. He is the essence of all beauty, grace, glory and lordliness. All powers become manifest in Him. The Bhagavatam beautifully describes Kṛṣṇa, its chosen incarnation, as “a centre abounding with auspicious qualities like truth, purity, kindness, patience, generosity, joy, straightforwardness, re-

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608 IX, 10, 12-13
609 X, 60, 58
610 IX, 10, 11
611 I, 1, 20; X, 15, 19; X, 45, 30, X, 84, 16 & 22-23; X, 5, 49
612 IX, 10, 11 & 13; X, 77, 23 & 28; X, 57, 9
613 X, 60, 58, X, 77, 31-32
614 X, 77, 31
615 I, 11, 37; X, 77, 30; X, 78, 16
616 X, 84, 32*-33*
617 X, 5, 18
618 X, 44, 14
619 X, 50, 57
straint of mind and senses, austerity, equanimity, fortitude, prowess, resourcefulness, memory, lordship, courage, skilfulness, attractiveness of form, heroism, sensitiveness of heart, power of intellect, modesty, goodness of nature, strength of mind and senses, the divine qualities included in Bhaga, unperturbedness, firmness, faith, fame, adorability and absence of egoism. "620 Again, Kṛṣṇa is adored as the master of all kinds of sentiments (Rasas) such as fear, heroism, passion, cordiality, terror, affection, destruction, inferiorness (to the ignorant), the Essence, and the adoration.621

The Lord Incarnate is the acme of all virtues and the culmination of all good qualities and majesties. There is no wonder in it because the creation rests in His Being as the warp and woof of a cloth.622 The virtues and qualities inherent in God Incarnate are the ideals set for the human beings to practice,623 and with their help, to rise above the stores of karmas and disposition (Svabhāva), and strive to attain the original nature of the self.

iii. He is Just:

God is called Yajnapati as the Supreme dispenser of the fruits of actions.624 In dispensing the fruits of Karmas He is impartial to anyone,625 although He is fond of His devotees.626 At times, He is thought as overriding the law of Karma and as behaving with partiality towards His devotees as in the Vāmana or Mohini incarnations. Certainly, this is not the proper understanding of either the law of Karma or the principle of grace (Kṛpa). More often than not the law of Karma and the principle of Grace find expression in such a way that they may be considered as the two ways of describing the same loving relationship of God with His subjects. As a fruit of true service, which is borne only of total self-surrender, God bestows His grace on His devotees.627 Moreover, He and He does not like the negligent (pramatta) people.628 How
ever, his gracefulness and justness are evident in His ways of dealing with the devotees and their adversaries. The Bhāgavatam conveys that while helping His devotees, He also bestows supreme good upon the adversaries of His devotees. He retrieved from Bali the heaven for Indra; but in turn, He vouchsafed His own self along with the kingdom of Sutala, which is envied upon even by the devas, to Bali.\textsuperscript{629} He liberates the souls of all whom He had to annihilate in order to establish the dharma and to protect the holy ones. The Bhāgavatam narrates numerous examples of such liberation such as, Hiranyakäsha-Hiranyakäsiṣṭu, Rāvaṇa-Kumbhakarna, Śiṣupāla-Dantavaktra, Kaṁsa, other demons like Putanā and many others. Thus, He is impartial governor. Prahlāda beautifully sings the glory of God as the impartial governor "Oh how miraculous are your acts and behaviour! ...you are omniscient, nay the veritable indwelling Soul of all, and hence, view all equally. Even though you are fond of your devotees, there is no partiality in your nature, you are just like the wish-yielding tree, by nature."\textsuperscript{630} He is the most compassionate and merciful. He grants His gracious look unto even the evil-minded ones if they take a little refuge in Him.\textsuperscript{631} Even by enmity, many have attained to the liberation. Such a compassionate one He is!

That He comes running towards His subjects just to free them from their swarming accumulation of karmas and their impressions (sanskāras), is the example of His transcendence of the law of Karma out of grace unto souls.

He is, however, the lover of His unreserved devotees (ekāntajanapriyah).\textsuperscript{632}

\textbf{11. Purpose of God's descent:}

The Bhāgavatam beautifully summarises the purpose of God's descent: Some say He is born in order to spread the fame of a particular race, some contend that He takes birth in response to the prayer of Brahmā – the demiurge or the parents to whom He is born, some say that He is born in order to lighten the burden of the evil and wicked off the earth, whereas only some say rightly that He is born for performing deeds worth hearing and remembering by the anxious devotees who are tortured by neuroscience, desires and karmas; those who resort to narrations of His acts will be

\textsuperscript{629} VIII,22,31-36
\textsuperscript{630} VIII,23,8 transl. Tagore
\textsuperscript{631} VIII,23,2 & 7; VII,9,27: X,41,47
\textsuperscript{632} VIII,24,31; X,41,47
blessed. General purpose of God’s descent is to bring the Good unto the creatures (go), holy men, gods, righteous ones, and the Vedas as also to safeguard the human values (purusārthas). Except His own will, also known as māyā, there can be no cause for the advent of the Transcendent. God manifests Himself into the world, out of His grace. There are three major considerations for the advent of an incarnation. The first is the will and joy of God. The second is the call of His advent. He responds to the prayer of His devotees in order to grant liberation unto them. It is His love for the devotees (Bhakta-vatsalāhood). The third is the promulgation of dharma and destruction of the evil.

i. Sport:
God is said to have taken births out of “His free will” (svecchāndopattadehāya) and “for sport” (lila or kriśyopattadehā). “Joy” (vinod) is the sole purpose of God’s advent. This sport, joy, or free will is to be understood as the purpose from God’s viewpoint. For devotees, it is, however, for the liberation, protection of dharma and destruction of the evil.

ii. Avatāra, the Bhakta-vatsalā: The Avatārahood is an inconceivably giant step of the compassion-formed God towards His subjects who strive to inch towards Him. He is, as if, not free, subject always to His devotees with His heart under their sway; therefore, He, the Para Brahma comes down as a human being playing several roles as a dear friend, well-wisher, relative, master (Guru), servant and the very self even though He is sought after by the greatest sages for the bliss of liberation (Nīrāṇa). He shares very intimate
moments with the people around Him. What a being may not be able to accomplish in its millions of lives, God, by presenting Himself before the being, grants it, as if, like “a fruit in a palm”. The creation is bound to proceed according to the law of *Karma* instituted by God Himself. But when a being finds itself entangled into the quagmire of its own *Karma* and *svabhāva*, thereby exhausting its capacity to liberate itself, *Hari*, the most compassionate one, cannot help Himself but to succour His distressed existence. He can wipe out the *Karmas* of His devotees. The Transcendental Supreme adopts individuality to put an end to the sufferings of the souls and to bestow liberation on them.

### iii. To save the devout and to chastise the evil:

In line with the *Bhagavat Gītā*, the *Bhāgavatam* describes the purpose of God’s incarnation as, “protection of the holy ones, destruction of the evil ones, and establishment of dharma.” God manifests Himself into the world, out of His grace, whenever the necessity of His succour becomes inevitable; that is, whenever the unrighteousness (*adharma*) is in rise and the righteousness – His law (dharma) needs to be redefined, to be reasserted, or to be implemented. He appears in the world, to save his existence, in the form of *devas*, *rsis*, men and lower species just as a member of those species. He assumes the form of *sattva* in order to shower immortality and delight upon those who turn towards Him as well as to bring disaster and death upon the evil ones or to bring the welfare of all and to rid the world of its unbearable burden of evil.

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644 X,82,31
645 X,70,39
646 XII,2,17
647 X,29,14; XII,8,41
648 III,33,5; X,14,20*; X,16,33; X,50,9; X,65,37; X,70,27
649 X,14,2
650 III,24,37; IX,24,56; X,58,37; X,60,2; X,65,20
651 VI,9,26; X,63,27; X,7,2
652 X,1,7; X,2,29; X,27,9; X,84,18
653 VII,1,6; IX,3,34; IX,24,59; X,27,5-6; X,38,10; X,63,27; X,70,27; X,85,18 & 30
iv. **Avatāra establishes the Law:**

Whenever the ancient path of enlightenment as revealed by God and the pious ones are in danger at the hands of evil-minded atheists, God appears from time to time in order to maintain the standards of morality set by Himself. However, God as the most compassionate one, sometimes in a mysterious way protects and communes with His devotees in the heights of Divine Love that to the ignorant people His glorious deeds appear as the indulgence in the mundane or as the transgression of morality. The one who Himself manifests as time, place, sacrificial offerings, Mantras, practices, sacrificing priests, sacrificial fire, deities, master of sacrifice and fruits of the sacrifice, is considered by the men of perverse intelligence as merely a human being. His ways are mysterious even though they appear similar to those of ordinary man or full of partiality towards His devotees. In fact, they are not partial, as all are equal for Him and as He is like the wish-yielding tree, which affords whatever the supplicant begs of. His incomprehensible and indescribable excellences, deeds, and births may be inferred sometimes, but they can only be directly realized by the devotees through their devotion. The wise ones adore each action of God, understand it and try to realize it.

He is the greatest among the knowers of dharma. He does not break the law but makes it. God transcends the books of laws, He is the origin of the laws, and he binds laws, i.e., whatever He does is the law. He is called the best among the observers of dharma. How can one attribute dust to the sky? *Sūka* pertinently rejects

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654 X,49,23; III,2,15
655 X,58,37
656 I,3,35; X,60,36
657 X,61,2
658 X,23,10-11 & 47-48
659 I,8,29
660 VIII,23,8
661 X,46,37
662 VIII,23,8; X,72,6
663 X,23,35-36
664 III,25,11
665 X,78,31
666 IX,8,13
Parikṣit’s dubiety about the Lord’s morality. He points out that “just like fire, which can consume anything, be it dirt or poison and yet can remain pure and unaffected”, God – the universal spirit (Adhyakṣa) can perform any action without being affected in least by it; and that “for the blessings of beings, He assumes a body and sports in ways that are suitable to fulfil his purpose” Śūka also warns that an ordinary person should not try to imitate the inscrutable and extra-ordinary ways of the Lord Incarnate, but rather should adore them. He is Hṛṣīkeśa – the Lord of the senses; innumerable sense-objects cannot affect Him even if He enjoys them, but the others dread the influence of those objects even while they are aloof from them.

v. In response to the call for His advent:
In Itihāsas and Purāṇas, all the incarnations are mentioned to have manifested at the instance of intense prayer of the devotees. By prayer, He incarnates and shows that prayer is the shortest way to emancipation. Moreover, He shows that each single being has an access to Him. God is ready to attend to every being singly, irrespective of its karmic and existential status. He redeems mobile and immobile creatures from their sins. If the prayer were intense, God is pleased to take the incarnation even for a single being, as in the case of ‘Hari’ who descended to liberate and give vision to Ga-jendra. Incarnations, from Matsya to Nṛsiṁha, from Kapila to Īśa, are in response to the intense prayer by Brahmā, gods or the rṣis.

Buddha and Kalkī are supposed to be the incarnations in response to the call of the age of Kali.

vi. So that man shall love Him and call Him his own:
The incarnation of God is intended not merely for lightening the burden of evil off the earth, but also for the convenience of the constant meditation of the devotees who have set their hearts only on God. By His unexcelled beauty He attracts the looks of

667 X,33,30-37
668 X,33,36
669 1,11,36
670 1,6,17-18
671 X,90,48
672 1,11,20; X,1,17-20
673 1,7,25
all, by his sweet words the minds of all who remember them, by His foot-prints He inspires the actions of those who espy them; for the good of all He spreads His glory all over so that man can overcome the darkness of nescience and *samsāra* by reciting and hearing about them,⁶⁷⁴ and that the humanity can get exclusively devoted to Him by listening to, remembering and realizing His sportive actions.⁶⁷⁵*

Thus, he takes birth for the general welfare (*maṅgāya ca lokānām kṣemāya ca bhavāya ca*), for bringing the eternal bliss to all beings,⁶⁷⁶ in order to save and please His devotees,⁶⁷⁷ to teach the real import of communion through devotion even to the *Paramahāmasas*,⁶⁷⁸ *Śrī Hari* in all ages (*manvantaras*) enlightens the paths of Knowledge, Action and Yoga assuming the forms of the enlightened ones (*siddha*), the sages (*ṛṣis*) and the master-yogis (*yogesa*), respectively.⁶⁷⁹ It is only God Incarnate who reveals His ultimate nature unto man⁶⁸⁰ for, the capacity of the human mind to know the nature of the Supreme Reality, is extremely limited.

12. **NUMBER OF INCARNATIONS⁶⁸¹:**

The *Bhāgavatam* says that for the welfare and protection of the line of *Manu* i.e. the humanity, God manifests as incarnation repeatedly.⁶⁸² The *Bhāgavatam* sings the glory of the twenty-four Incarnations including the *Virāt* or the *Puruṣāvatāra* whom we have already referred to. They are:⁶⁸³ *Puruṣa, Sanat Kumāras, Nārada, Varāha, Kurma, Matsya, Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Kapila, Yajña, Vāmana, Parasurāma, Rāmacandra, Prthu, Ṛṣabhadeva, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Veda-Vyāsa, Dattātreyā, Dhanvantari, Mo-hini, Nṛsiṁha, Buddha* and *Kalki*. Out of the twenty-four incarnations, ten are believed to have cast more impact on our spiritual existence and enrichment. They are: *Matsya, Varāha, Kurma, Nṛsiṁha, Vāmana, Rāmacandra, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Bud-

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⁶⁷⁴ XI, 1, 6-7
⁶⁷⁵ I, 8, 35; X, 33, 37*
⁶⁷⁶ I, 1, 13; I, 14, 35; V, 20, 41; VII, 9, 13; XII, 2, 17
⁶⁷⁷ X, 14, 37
⁶⁷⁸ I, 8, 20
⁶⁷⁹ VIII, 14, 8
⁶⁸⁰ X, 87, 21
⁶⁸¹ (i) I, 3, 28(24); (ii) I, 17, 1(24); (iii) VII, 9, 38(7); (iv) X, 2, 4(8); (v) X, 40, 17-20 (14 including vyāhāra); (vi) XI, 4, 18-23(21)
⁶⁸² II, 7, 20; VIII, 5, 46; VIII, 13, 1-36
⁶⁸³ I, ch-3; II, 7, 1-39; VI, 8, 12-19; X, 40, 17-22; XI, 4, 3-22
dha, and Kalki who is yet to come. Among ten, the incarnations to have taken the form other than the human one are Matsya or the Fish, Kurma or the Tortoise, Varaha or the Boar and the Nrṣimha, the Man-Lion, being the combination of human and animal being. Incarnations of Hayagriva684 or the Horse-necked one, and Hamsa685 or the Swan as revealed to Sanat Kumāras, are often omitted from the list of twenty-four incarnations. Some incarnation like Sanat Kumāras, Nara-Nārāyana, Kapila, Nārada, Parāśurāma686 are believed to have the span of manifestation extending up to the end of cosmic era (kalpa); they always remain in the background, and function for the Good of all beings of the world. For instance, Nara-Nārāyana will live until the end of cosmic era out of mercy, revealing the nature of Ātman through austerity, highest morality (dharma), enlightenment, renunciation, magnificence, self-control and freedom from egoism.687 Some incarnations are eternally worshipped as Arcāvatāras. They are Rāma, Kiṣpa, Dattātreya, and Buddha.

It is not that God incarnates in the human form only. He may take any form that is to serve the cause. Moreover, it is not that God incarnates for human beings only. He may serve the cause at any stratum of existence, be it supra-human or sub-human specie or even the sphere quite unknown to us.688 The enumeration and narration of the incarnations as found in the scriptures refer only to the incarnations known to us. There may be some incarnation in the human specie itself, whom none or very few could know. Such incarnation appears in the world, accomplish His cause, and ascends to the realm of His origin.

In the line of the Rg-vedic hymn689, the Bhāgavatam says that there are numerous and far-famed incarnations and the exploits of God.690 "Innumerable are the descents (avatāras) of Hari, who is absolutely pure in His essence. They are numerous as wa-

684 II,7,11; V,18,1-6; VII,9,37*; X,40,17
685 X,2,40; XI,13,19
686 IX,16,26
687 V,19,9; X,87,6; XI,4,6
688 I,2,34; I,8,30; X,14,20*
689 Rg vedu,1.154,1a
690 IX,4,23
terways streaming out of a perennial lake." Kṛṣṇa says that the great rṣis of all time have not succeeded in computing the number of His births because it may be possible to count the particles of dust on this planet but not so His glories, deeds and names. Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā that there have been numerous incarnations of His.

The descendence of God can also be referred to the subjective level. The Lord can manifest in the realization of a devotee, thereby endowing him with His glory (vibhūti). The realization of a Bhāgavata is an incarnation of God, as in the case of Gajendramokṣa God is known. Every enlightened soul invokes an incarnation, and he, in turn is endowed with God's Vibhūthhood. In this way, there can be innumerable visitations of God, which can be considered as the incarnations.

13. NO FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION AMONG THE INCARNATIONS:

A scheme of evolution is often envisaged in the occurrence of incarnations. For instance, Fish incarnation is considered at the lowest level and Kalki at the highest level of the stage of evolution. However, according to the Bhāgavatam, there is no principle of evolution, as such, behind the advent of God. God takes the form that suits the nature of the purpose behind His descent. He incarnates in different times and in different places, taking different forms irrespective of the theory of evolution. For instance, the very first Manvantara, i.e., the rule of the first Manu of this Kalpa, is marked with incarnations of Kapila and Yajña. The incarnation of Kurma appears only in the sixth Manvantara. Thus, according to the Bhāgavatam, there is no theory of evolution among incarnations; and there is also no distinction among the incarnations based on human considerations. Considering the mysterious nature of the laws pertaining to the incarnations, one should refrain from applying human consideration and human ways of thinking while understanding the nature, number, type and activities of an incarnation.

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601 1,3,24 transl. S.T.
602 X,51,39
603 X,51,38
604 B.G.,IV,5
605 VIII,1,30
The main purpose of the incarnation is the destruction of the evil, the revelation of the divine path or both.\textsuperscript{696} God incarnates to fulfil more than one purpose. Sometimes a particular purpose remains at the fore. Each incarnation is a saviour and the enlightener. God may incarnate to serve the purpose of \textit{devas} and \textit{rṣis, asuras} as well as \textit{yakṣas} and \textit{rākṣasas} also.\textsuperscript{697} God often incarnates in form of devotees like the \textit{Sanat Kumāras, Nārada} and \textit{Ṛṣabha} in order to show respectively the paths of unbroken \textit{brahmacya},\textsuperscript{698} devotion as well as \textit{naiṣkarmya} (the transcendence of action),\textsuperscript{699} and \textit{Paramahāṁsa}.\textsuperscript{700} But His divinity cannot be said as less manifest in any of these incarnations.

Again, there are some lesser-known incarnations like \textit{Hayagrīva, Harīsa, Hari, Suyajña}, vision to Dhrūva and others, which are often omitted in the \textit{Bhāgavatam} itself from the list of incarnations.\textsuperscript{701} This difference in the narratives of incarnations is only due to the difference in the time and context of the narration of a particular account. At a certain point of time some incarnations had already manifested, and some not, while some were unknown to the narrator himself. Therefore, no distinction among incarnations should be made even on the basis of the purpose He fulfils and whether or not we know much about Him.

\textbf{i. Incarnations as an \textit{Aṁśa} or \textit{Kalā} (part and portion) of God:}

Every incarnation is a manifestation of God and the \textit{sādhaka} sees total Godhood in each incarnation. Some scholars, however, differentiate among the incarnations – some as the part (\textit{aṁśa}) of God whereas some as merely particles (\textit{kalā}); some are further classified as the part of the part (\textit{aṁśāṁśa}) or even as \textit{aṁśa-kalā}. According to Jīva Goswamī\textsuperscript{702}, the Supreme Lord, by His divine will, can manifest His power anywhere without interruption, while the parts (\textit{aṁśa}) can manifest for performing their appointed mission; and incarnations in the human form may be called as particles (\textit{kalā}). In his opinion, all incarnations are parts of God; only \textit{Krṣṇa} is the total God.

\textsuperscript{696} V, 19, 5; VIII, 1, 5; X, 50, 10
\textsuperscript{697} VII, 1, 8
\textsuperscript{698} I, 3, 6
\textsuperscript{699} I, 3, 8
\textsuperscript{700} I, 3, 13; V, 3, 20
\textsuperscript{701} I, 3, 1-25; XI, ch.-4
\textsuperscript{702} AITM. FN, I, 1, 17 & I, 2, 28
In the opinion of Sridhara, “āmśas are consubstantial with God. Thus, they possess all the powers of God although such powers need not be displayed all at a time, or even all at different times. Kalās, on the other hand, are other than God, i.e., individual souls, they have to their credit specific powers, acquired from birth or afterwards, by drawing upon the majesty of God.”

Prof. Sheridan draws the following line between amśa and kalā even while conceding that this type of classification is only used sparingly in the Bhāgavatam. According to him, “the part manifestations (amśa) are parts of God’s omniscience and omnipotence which enter the phenomenal process on the behalf of men...The part manifestation can take place by Bhagavān possessing a person in a unique way; it is a displacement of normal human processes by God. On the other hand, the portion manifestation (kalā) are God-filled persons.” He sites the examples of Vyāsa, Gaya, Datta, and Kumāra among humans beside gods as the examples of kalā whereas Rśabha is considered as amśa-kalā.

The Bhāgavatam is the book of Kṛṣṇa saga hence it aims to extol Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of God - ‘Bhagavān Svayam’. The dictum has been stretched beyond its original purport by certain sect-specific ideologies, which try to project distinction among the incarnations based on this dictum; however, the rational and universal spirit of the Bhāgavatam would apply the meaning to each incarnation of God. Following are the points that require to be considered while analyzing the phrase ‘Kṛṣṇastu Bhagavān svayam’:

Kṛṣṇa’s life presents the ideals for a complete man; he is the best as a child, boy, student, friend, hero, householder, diplomat, ruler, wise man, and even a detached recluse although surrounded by the causes of bondage. However, certain ideals are more reflected in the lives of incarnations of Rāma and Prthu, in particular, the fact that would rationally project them as the ideals to be followed. The impact of Rāma’s life on the religious as well as secular life of Indian people is testimony to it.
The *Bhāgavatam* aims to narrate the *Kṛṣṇa* saga, which had a direct implication on the lives of the narrator, enquirer, listeners, and the time just preceding as well as following the time of narration. Hence, all of them had a great amount of emotional attachment to *Kṛṣṇa*.

The *Bhāgavatam* also describes *Kṛṣṇa* as ‘*kala*’ and “the *amsa* of *Mahāviṣṇu*,”\textsuperscript{707} which mitigates the claim that *Kṛṣṇa* is the total incarnation and to be considered as superior to other incarnations.

In our view, the apparent contradiction between the two descriptions could be removed if it is clarified that *Kṛṣṇa*’s description as “*Bhagavān svayam*” or “*Bhagavān Hari Iśvara*”\textsuperscript{708} refers to the ontological identity of *Bhagavān* and the incarnation; and that the description of His being the *amsa* of *Mahāviṣṇu* indicates that by taking incarnation, God’s transcendental being is not exhausted. The transcendental being of God remains the same whether at a particular time, He incarnates or not. To the devotee every incarnation that changes his life and brings in the supreme peace is not just a part of God but a *purṇāvatāra*, the total God with all His powers manifest. According to Sridhara, this ascription of a partial character to the *Kṛṣṇa* manifestation as “the *amsa* of *Mahāviṣṇu*” is the concession to the partial nature of the perception of the observer.\textsuperscript{709}

What is said about *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Bhāgavatam* applies not only to each incarnation of God that the *Bhāgavatam* extols, but also to the prophets of other religions as well. The *Bhāgavatam* extols every incarnation as the Supreme Reality. Only if one understands and realizes that *Kṛṣṇa* or any other incarnation is verily *Mahāviṣṇu* or *Para Brahma*, the Supreme Reality, then alone one can be said to have understood the *Bhāgavatam* doctrine of incarnation, which is thoroughly monotheistic and monistic. An attempt to differentiate *Kṛṣṇa* from other incarnations would actually do injustice to the understanding of the ontological unity of *Kṛṣṇa* with the Supreme Reality. Instead of considering *Kṛṣṇa* as superior to other incarnations, the *Bhāgavatam* would identify the divinity of all incarnations, regardless of the land of their respective origin.

\textsuperscript{707} X,1,16; X,10,35; X,89,59
\textsuperscript{708} X,46,42
\textsuperscript{709} Sheridan,p.68
or the religion that worships them, with the essential nature of Kṛṣṇa, and arrive at the universal Being as well as the universally acceptable religion. God - the Ultimate Reality - is one and only one, without any second of its kind; and this one God chooses to appear in the form of many incarnations all over the universe.

ii. Vibhūti of God:
There is, however, a clear line of distinction drawn between the incarnation of God and a special aspect (vibhūti) of God. The distinction in God’s manifestation in different entities is evident in the doctrine of vibhūti as preached in the Bhāgavatam as well as in the Gita. God is everything; but still He manifests His special aspect of power, prosperity, fame, lordliness, modesty, renunciation, attractiveness, luck, courage, endurance and knowledge in a unit of a class as a model for that class. Thus, the distinction of manifestation of divinity among various beings and that of everything from God must be accepted by sadhaka while always knowing that God is the substratum of all unity and distinctness. Nothing is independent or equal to God either in the state of creation or dissolution.

14. BODY OF THE LORD INCARNATE:
The consciousness as well as the body that the Lord assumes when He Incarnates are of Viśuddha (purest) Sattva which makes it possible for the devotees to worship Him - the Transcendental Para Brahma - through the Vedas, rituals, austerity and the realization (samādhi). The body of incarnation is described as having only Purest Sattva as its constituent element unlike all prākṛta existence because, God is neither bound by the law of Karma which is the cause of birth in the transmigratory world, or by the law of Matter which binds every single existence with the rope (guna) of sattva, rajas and tamas. Moreover, it is in sattva that the state of fearlessness and bliss of self are experienced. The jīvātmās are born and bound in saṁsāra because

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210 XI,ch.16; II,7,43-44
211 XI,16,40; II,7,44; BG, X,41
212 X,2,34; X,46,23
213 X,2,34
214 X,46,39
215 X,46,40
216 XII,8,46
of ignorance (avidya) whereas God assumes the body out of His will or sport.\textsuperscript{77} For this reason the incarnation's body represents the acme of beauty (Lavanya dhāmno)\textsuperscript{78} in all spheres of the universe\textsuperscript{79} (sakalasundara sannīveśa)\textsuperscript{80} surpassing all that the decorations can achieve.\textsuperscript{81} His body of Šuddha Sattva as well as all His activities as the Embodied One represents the excellences such as truth (Satya), righteousness (Rta), mercy (Dayā), and glory (Yaśa).\textsuperscript{82}

In spite of His body being the subject of worship and the cause of liberation of sādhakas, He abandons it having fulfilled the purpose of His embodiment just as a thorn is plucked out of body with the aid of another one and finally both are thrown away.\textsuperscript{83} Rṣabha,\textsuperscript{84} Prthu\textsuperscript{85} as well as Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma also abandoned the physical body.\textsuperscript{86} Kṛṣṇa let His august body burn up in the yogic fire\textsuperscript{87} "because He wanted to demonstrate that this mortal body is of no ultimate value, and that the way of those established in Ātman is to let it fall without any regret,"\textsuperscript{88} and also to show that He had no distinction between His body and the bodies of the Asuras as well as the Yādavas whom He despatched.\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{15. Summary:}

The \textit{Bhāgavatam} is uniquely monistic and monotheistic. It uncompromisingly accepts only one reality as the ultimate. Its unreserved idea of the Supreme Reality has room for every concept of the Supreme Reality, which different religions of the world nurture. The total monism of the \textit{Bhāgavatam} considers everything that appears to exist as dependent on the One for its relative identity. The relative identity is an epistemo-
logical phenomenon and refers to the subject. In this sense, it may be considered as closer to the subjective idealism. But, it would be an error to define the Bhāgavatam outlook strictly in a particular mould. Even while admitting the subjective idealism, the Bhāgavatam does not overlook the importance of the objective realism the impact of which is greater on the phenomenological existence of the individual. According to the Bhāgavatam, defining the Supreme Reality in a particular way exclusive of any other way tantamount to ignorance. The infinity of the Supreme Reality has enough space for any number of possibilities regarding its manifestations as also regarding its comprehension by different individuals. Therefore, the Bhāgavatam refrains from taking any exclusive view with regard to the Supreme Reality, and also from totally denying any of the prevalent views. In tune with the Śruti, it reiterates the truth that the non-dual Brahman is variously sung by the sages.\textsuperscript{330}

In its idea of the world, the Bhāgavatam totally reflects its monistic ideology. The world is real as long as it is experienced as real; it loses the ‘reality’ of experience when the Supreme Reality is known to be the reality behind the world. This gap in two kinds of experiences is christened as ‘māyā’, which is not taken as a reality but only as a name of the false experience of the non-reality as the reality. In this sense, the Bhāgavatam appears to be closer to the Kevalādvaita.

The Supreme Reality is transcendental as well as immanent and personal. It attends to every soul singly. In Its redemptive capacity, It also incarnates in the world in the form of a lighthouse and the guiding star. The universal approach of the Bhāgavatam in every of its philosophical ideas has enough mettle to embrace the religious ideas of all other religions. Thus, the Bhāgavatam would not hesitate even for a twinkling of an eye to admit the prophets of other religions into Its fold just as It has revered Buddha and Rṣabhadeva as the incarnations of the Supreme Reality.

Its outlook is unbounded openness. Its focus is exclusively on God.

\textsuperscript{330} xi,9,31